Spring 2019 - Expressive Culture: Opera in Florence  
CORE-UA 9732  
Thursdays 3:00PM-5:45PM  
Aula Firenze

Class Description:
For more than four centuries, opera has made us cry and laugh, and it still speaks to us today about ourselves and our lives. It does so by telling us stories of love and death, of power and oppression, by combining words, music and stage action, and through ever new styles of performance.

This course is designed to introduce you to modes and methods for the interpretation and appreciation of this unique artform, and to foster your ongoing engagement with opera. Through critical exposure to a selection of major works by Monteverdi, Mozart, Verdi, and Puccini, you will develop an understanding of how their meaning is constructed by their creators, their intended recipients, and their reception into other traditions of collection, interpretation, use, and study. By learning to disentangle the intricacies of a uniquely complex art form, you will deepen your ability to deal with complexity beyond opera.

Meetings will be organised around individual operas, exploring their historical background, text and music, performing issues, reception history, and adaptation to other media (not necessarily in this sequence). Each opera will also be taken as a vantage point to explore one main thematic issue in opera, such as social mores, morality, power, love and seduction, death, loss, family ties. Broader issues – such as genre, the development of formal conventions of librettos and music, Italian opera and its terminology, modes of production, cultural expression, social factors, how opera fits into the larger history of ideas in Western culture – will build up over the course.

An integral part of the course will be attending opera productions of three operas discussed during sessions, Madama Butterfly and The Barber of Seville (in Florence), and La Traviata (in Bologna).

Some of the questions the course will consider are:

- Can a most implausible form of narration like opera tell true stories and give voice to true feelings and emotions?
- What kind of relationships between the individual, the family, and the community does opera deal with, and how?
- Has opera been a means of social and political criticism, and how?
- How are factors such as gender, class, race, and religion addressed in Italian operas? And how can we deal with them today?
- How does music mould words, action, and storytelling in opera?
- How do different ways of staging an opera impact on its meaning and expression?
Instructor Details:
Name: Gaia V. Varon
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Office Hours: Thursdays, 2:00PM-3:00 PM p.m., or by appointment
Villa Ulivi Office Location:
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Desired Outcomes:
As part of the Expressive Culture program, this course is intended to introduce you to the study and appreciation of human artistic creation and to foster your ongoing engagement with the arts. Through critical engagement with primary cultural artifacts, it introduces you to formal methods of interpretation and to understanding the importance of expressive creation in specific social and historical contexts. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, it is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society.

On completion of this course, students should:

● Have improved their ability to think critically, engage in complex reasoning and express their thoughts clearly through their written work

● Have improved their ability to critically examine the definition and autonomy of opera and the importance of expressive creation and recreation

● Have improved their understanding of a complex artform, focusing on the ways different elements cooperate in making an opera work in general, and specifically for us today

● Have improved their understanding of how an artwork of the past can help them look at themselves and the society they live in

Assessment Components

● Attendance and Participation: 20%
● Written Assignments (four 1/2 page reaction papers): 20%
● Midterm Exam: 20%
● Final Paper: 20%
● Final Exam: 20%

Written Assignments. You will write four short reaction papers (1/2 pages): one on weekly readings and/or viewings through the course (due before the relevant section); three on the three operas attended live (La Traviata, Nabucco Il Trittico). You will also be asked to initiate the discussion of the weekly readings and/or viewings through a five-minute oral presentation.
Final paper. This is a longer writing assignment (6-8 pages) in which you will analyze, compare and discuss comparatively two different productions of the same opera.

Mid-term and final exams include three essay questions each. You will be presented with three broad topics discussed in class; you will be asked to write a well-organized essay, with an introduction, exposition and conclusion in response to each of these. You are expected to cite relevant primary sources analyzed in class – texts and/or operas – and/or operas attended; answers that do not cite any of these primary sources will not receive full credit.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

Assessment Expectations:

- **Grade A (Excellet/outstanding):** The student’s work demonstrates an understanding of the subject that goes beyond assigned course readings. The student writes essays/exam questions that are an original synthesis of source materials, demonstrating the ability to evaluate source material critically. Written arguments are clear, well-organized and well-presented; oral presentations are concise, incisive and supplemented by appropriate visual materials. The student has distinguished himself/herself throughout the course of the semester for his/her contributions to class discussion.

- **Grade B (Good):** The student’s work shows a clear understanding of assigned readings and materials covered in class. The student writes clear, well-organized and well-presented essays/exam questions; oral presentations are concise, incisive and supplemented by appropriate visual materials. The student is prepared in class and asks relevant questions.

- **Grade C (Satisfactory):** The student’s work shows a basic understanding of the subject treated in assigned readings and covered in class. However, written and/or oral work is deficient in one or more of the following areas: clarity, organization or content. The student’s work is generally in need of improvement.

- **Grade D (Poor):** The student’s work shows occasional understanding of the subject treated in assigned readings and covered in class. Written and/or oral work is deficient in one of more of the follow areas: clarity, organization or content. The student does not participate in class discussion.

- **Grade F (Fail):** The student’s work does not demonstrate understanding of the subject treated in assigned readings and covered in class. Written and/or oral work are either insufficient or are not submitted. The student appears unprepared in class.

Grading Guidelines

A = 94-100

A minus = 90-93

B plus = 87-89

B = 84-86
B minus = 80-83

C plus = 77-79

C = 74-76

C minus = 70-73

D plus = 67-69

D = 65-66

F = below 65

Grading Policy:
Please refer to Assessment Expectations and the policy on late submission of work

Academic Accommodations:
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see the Moses Center for further information.

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see Study Away and Disability.

Attendance Policy:
Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

For courses that meet once a week, one unexcused absence will be penalized by a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. For courses that meet two or more times a week, the same penalty will apply to the number of class times over a single week

Excused Absences:
In case of absence, regardless of the reason, the student is responsible for completing missed assignments, getting notes and making up missed work in a timely manner based upon a schedule that is mutually agreed
upon between the faculty member and the student. **The only excused absences are those approved by the Office of Academic Support; they are as follows:**

**Absence Due to Illness**
- If you are sick, please see a doctor. Contact the Office of Student Life for assistance.
- For absences that last for two or more consecutive days, a doctor’s certificate, “certificato medico” is required. The doctor will indicate in writing the number of days of bed rest required. Please note these certificates can only be obtained on the day you see the doctor and cannot be written for you afterwards.
- Absences can ONLY be excused if they are reported WITHIN 48 HRS of your return to class via the online NYU Florence Absence Form.
- OAS will not accept a student email or telephone call regarding an absence due to illness.
- OAS will only notify faculty of absences REPORTED on the ABSENCE FORM.
- The Office of Student Life, when assisting you in cases of severe or extended illness, will coordinate with the Office of Academic Support to properly record your absences.

**Due to Religious Observance**
- Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.
- Information regarding absences due to religious observance must be provided at least SEVEN DAYS PRIOR to the date(s) in question using the online NYU Florence Absence Form.
- Please note that no excused absences for reasons other than illness can be applied retroactively.

**Due to a class conflict with a program sponsored lecture, event, or activity**
- All students are entitled to miss one class period without any penalty to their grade in order to attend a lecture, event or activity that is sponsored by La Pietra Dialogues, Acton Miscellany or the Graduate Lecture series.
- Information regarding absences due to a class conflict must be provided at least SEVEN DAYS PRIOR to the date(s) in question using the online NYU Florence Absence Form.
- Please note that no excused absences for reasons other than illness can be applied retroactively.

**Students with questions or needing clarification about this policy are instructed to contact a member of the Office of Academic Support located in Villa Ulivi or to email florence.academicsupport@nyu.edu**

**Late Submission of Work**
- All course work must be submitted on time, in class on the date specified on the syllabus.
- To request an extension on a deadline for an assignment, students must speak to the professor one week prior to the due date.
• To receive an incomplete for a course at the end of the semester, two weeks before final exams, both the student and the faculty member must meet with the Assistant Director of Academic Affairs to review the request and if granted, they must both sign an Incomplete Contract detailing the terms for completing missing coursework.

Plagiarism Policy

PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN ANY FORM:
The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

In the event of suspected or confirmed cases of plagiarism, the faculty member will consult first with the Assistant Director for Academic Affairs as definitions and procedures vary from school to school.
Writing Center:
The Writing Center, located in Villa Ulivi, offers you feedback on any type of writing, at any stage in planning or drafting; very rough drafts are welcome. Sign up for a consultation at the Writing Center’s website and submit your working draft or ideas at least six hours in advance to NYU Florence Writing Center. You can drop in for a consultation M-Th, but remember that appointments are given priority. Please also note that the Writing Center does not correct or “fix” your writing but prompts you to think and work. The aim is to create stronger writers in the long term, not necessarily perfect papers in the short term.

Required Text(s):
Opera Journeys Libretto Series:
   Giacomo Puccini, Il Trittico (Tabarro, Suor Angelica, Gianni Schicchi)
   Wolfgang A. Mozart, Le nozze di Figaro
   Giuseppe Verdi, La Traviata

C. Abbate, R. Parker, A History of Opera, The Last Four Hundred Years, New York, 2012
Tim Carter, Understanding Italian Opera, Oxford, 2015
Marcia Citron, When Opera meets Film, Cambridge, 2010
Catherine Clément, Opera, or, The Undoing of Women, Minneapolis, 1988
Arman Schwartz, and Emanuele Senici, Giacomo Puccini and His World, Princeton, 2016
Tom Sutcliffe, Believing in Opera. Princeton, 2014

Copies of each textbook are available for consultation and short term loans in the Villa Ulivi Library. Extra copies of some textbooks are also available for semester long loans. More information on Books and Course Materials.

Supplemental Texts(s):
A list of required and recommended opera recordings and films will be given.
Texts that students are not required to are in NYU-FL Library or available online.

Internet Research Guidelines:
The careful use of internet resources is encouraged and a list of recommended websites will be given. Failure to cite internet and other non-traditional media sources in your written work constitutes plagiarism.

Additional Required Equipment:
N/A

Class Assignments and Topics:

Session 1 – September 5
Introduction to the course. What is opera?. Text, music, staged action.
Voice types and singing roles in 19th century Italian Opera.

Session 2- September 12
Morality and social mores. Verdi, La Traviata

Kavanagh, The girl who loved camellias, pp. 3-18
La Traviata, a brief introduction (from the Met), pp. 5-14 (35-44)

Session 3- September 19 NO CLASS
Saturday, September 20, Florence, Opera di Firenze, Verdi, La traviata

Session 4- September 26 (Assignment 1 – La traviata)
Power, victims and family ties in Verdi’s operas

Clément, Opera, or, The Undoing of Women, pp. 60-65
Kerman, “Verdi and the Undoing of Women”, COJ, Vol.18, No. 1 (March 2006), pp. 21-31
Abbate, Parker, A History of Opera, “Waltzes and a Weeping Father”, pp. 376-382

Session 5- October 3
The chorus as protagonist. Verdi’s Nabucco

Session 6 - October 10 NO CLASS
Sunday, October 13 – Parma, Verdi, Il Nabucco
   Explore the ROH Interactives - Opera Machine

Session 7- October 19 (Assignment 2 – Parma/Nabucco)
   Social Issues and the Rhythm of Comedy. Mozart, Le nozze di Figaro
   Carter, Understanding Italian Opera, Ch. 4, pp. 108-150

Session 8- October 24
   Mid-term Exam.
   Levin, Unsettling Opera, Ch. 3, “Fidelity in Translation”, pp. 66-98
   Citron, When Opera meets Film, Ch. 3, “Subjectivity in the opera film of Jean Pierre Ponnelle”, pp. 97-135

Session 9 – November 7 (Assignment 3 – Le Nozze di Figaro)
   Three worlds in one. Puccini, Il Trittico
   Young, Puccini: A listener’s Guide, Ch. 7 (pp. 109-126)

Session 10 – November 14
   Conversation with Denis Krief, opera director, about his Florence production of Il Trittico
   Müller, ‘Regietheater/Director’s theatre’, in The Oxford Handbook of Opera
   Sutcliffe, “A Repertoire of Classics”, Believing in Opera, pp. 53-77

Saturday, November 17, Florence, Opera di Firenze, Puccini, Il Trittico

Session 11 – November 21 NO CLASS

Session 12 – November 28 (Assignment 4 – Puccini, Il Trittico)
   Opera across media
   Citron, “Visual Media”, The Oxford Handbook of Opera
Session 13 – December 5  
‘Composing an opera in the 21st century’. Conversation with the composer Alessandro De Rosa

Session 13 – May 14 (Final Paper due)  
Final Exam

Classroom Etiquette

- Eating is not permitted in the classrooms. Bottled water is permitted.
- Cell phones should be turned off during class time.
- The use of personal laptops and other electronic handheld devices are prohibited in the classroom unless otherwise specified by the professor.
- We recycle! So keep it green! Please dispose of trash in the clearly marked recycle bins located throughout the on campus buildings

Required Co-curricular Activities
- Saturday, September 21: Verdi, La Traviata, Florence, Opera di Firenze  
- Sunday, October 13: Verdi, Nabucco, Parma, Teatro Regio  
- Sunday, November 17: Puccini, Il Trittico, Florence, Opera di Firenze

Suggested Co-curricular Activities
Suggested optional co-curricular activities will be announced in class and/or via email by the professor throughout the semester.

Your Instructor
A musicologist loving to spread love for music, Gaia Varon is University Lecturer in Music at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan. She is also author and presenter of music programmes for Rai Radio3 (among which all the live broadcasts from Milan Teatro alla Scala), Swiss Radio Rete 2 and television music channels. She has published articles and book chapters on symphonic and operatic music on screen, classical music recording style and technique, and music in avant-garde short films, and is presently working on a book on Beethoven’s Fifth on screen. Winner of the The international Rotary Club of Parma “Giuseppe Verdi”, she is working on a book on the dramatic functions of the instrumental component in Verdi’s operas.