Expressive Culture: Opera in Florence

Course Number
CORE-UA 9732 F01

Instruction Mode: In-person

Brightspace course site https://brightspace.nyu.edu/d2l/home/164481

Spring 2022

If you are enrolled in this course 100% remotely and are not a Study Away student for NYU Florence, please make sure that you’ve completed the online academic orientation via Brightspace so you are aware of site specific support structure, policies and procedures. Please contact florence.academicsupport@nyu.edu if you have trouble accessing the Brightspace site.

Syllabus last updated on: 13 January 2022

Lecturer Contact Information
Gaia Varon

Units earned
4

Course Details
● Thursday from 1:30pm to 4:15pm
● All times are Central European Time (CET) Please note that there is a gap in when Daylight Savings Time (DST) begins in Europe and the U.S. In the U.S., DST begins on Sunday, 13 March 2022 when clocks will be set 1 hour forward. In Europe, DST begins Sunday, 27 March 2022.

● Location: Rooms will be posted in Albert before your first class.

● Remote Participants: Your instructor will provide you with the Zoom link via NYU Brightspace.

● COVID-related details: In the interest of protecting the NYU Florence community, we are closely following CDC guidance around COVID-19 and adjusting our recommendations and policies accordingly. Your health and well-being is our top priority.
Course Description
Can we cry for the love troubles of a prostitute or the sadness of a witch? Or laugh while watching a man of power harassing his servant? It happens with opera, the most dramatic, spectacular, and emotional form of European culture. Combining words, music and stage action, opera creates a separate, artificial, sometimes absurd, space and time where we experience intense and compelling emotions. While this is itself a pleasure, opera also challenges our biases and allows us to approach crucial issues of everyday life from an unusual perspective, distinct from ordinary experience: to what extent can an extravagant art form from the past prove itself truly contemporary and help us understand our present private and public life?

To answer this question, this course investigates opera in a multidisciplinary perspective. Meetings will be organized around individual operas, each one being taken as a vantage point to explore one main thematic issue (social mores, family ties, power, social hierarchy, seduction, death, loss, racial and gender stereotypes). This course is intended to help you appreciate one of the most profound and beautiful art forms, while also allowing you to reflect upon emotions that are important in your own lives.

Course Objectives
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.

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 art form, 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
You are expected to attend class in person or remote synchronously. Failure to submit or fulfill any required component may result in failure of the class, regardless of grades achieved in other assignments.

- Academic Commitment: 10%
- Oral Presentation of a Reading Assignment: 10%
- Weekly Essay Questions (2 Short Video Presentations, 15% each): 30%
- Responses to your colleagues Video Presentations: 10%
- Written assignments (response papers): 20% (two papers, 10% each)
- Final Exam: 20%

Academic Commitment: 10%
A student’s commitment will be evaluated based on active participation, involvement and contribution in the course either remote or in-person. This may include, but is not limited to, presence at synchronous class sessions, timely submission of predetermined course assignments to the instructor, collaboration with peers in group course work both during class time or independently outside of class time, individual oral or written contributions to synchronous course time through the chat function, in person discussion, or in individual office
hours with the instructor. In an asynchronous format this academic engagement may take the form of written contributions to course forums, adding comments to posted work on VoiceThread or Google Drive shared docs.

*Oral Presentation of a Reading Assignment: 10%*
Over the course, you will be assigned one significant reading to report in an oral presentation of approximately 10 minutes length.

*Weekly Essay Questions (2 Video Presentations, 15% each): 30%*
You will give two short presentations answering questions and providing comments to specific questions/topics. In Brightspace you will find texts and/or audio/video excerpts from the opera discussed in class and/or available as reading/screening assignments; you will create a Voice Thread where you will answer the questions and provide comments, as required in the given guidelines.

Responses to your colleagues Video Presentations: 10%
You will watch all your colleagues' video presentations and post your comments on the respective VoiceThread presentations.

*Written Assignment: 20% (two response papers, 10% each)*
You will write two short response papers (500 words) on weekly readings and/or screenings through the course.

*Final exam: 20%*
You will be presented with a selection of short texts: extracts from books or chapters or longer articles, or short newspaper articles. You will choose two of them and write an essay (1000 words) in which you will discuss the statements and arguments given in your chosen articles, and take them as starting point to developing your own argument. In your discussion, you will capitalize on readings and screening from the course, on class presentations and discussions, and on the operas attended. You will support your statements and arguments by bringing in specific examples (scenes, situations, characters).

All assignments are due before the relevant session. Specific guidelines will be given for each assignment. You will meet with me individually via Zoom to discuss prospective discussion topics, individual project topics and the scenes, the stage/video production and the texts you will consider in your final paper. You will need to send drafts of your group project and your final paper and I will provide feedback and commentary before you submit your final version of each paper.

**Attendance Policy**
*In order to keep each other safe, if you are not feeling well, we encourage you to remain in your residence and, if possible, attend class remotely.*
*Please make sure to inform your professor in advance so that they can turn on Zoom. Remote attendance is counted as regular attendance. You will not be marked absent.*
For a detailed explanation of the global attendance policy, see the NYU Florence Present vs. Absent Flowchart.
Exams, tests and quizzes, deadlines, and oral presentations that are missed due to illness always require a doctor's note as documentation.
The Global Attendance Policy is posted in the Academic Policies tab in Brightspace, on the NYU Florence Student Portal website, and is posted around campus.
After you have read and reviewed the policies, if there is anything that still needs further clarification or raises a question, please reach out to florence.academicsupport@nyu.edu.

Final exams
Final exams must be taken at their designated times. Should there be a conflict between your final exams, please bring this to the attention of the Academics team. Final exams may not be taken early, and students should not plan to leave the site before the end of the finals period.

Late Submission of Work
Please refer to Academic Policies in Brightspace.

Required Text(s)
All readings and screening assignments are listed below and due before the relevant session. All readings and video recordings are available online on the NYU Brightspace course site. Hard copies of some textbooks are available for consultation and semester-long loans in the Villa Ulivi Library. Please email florence.library@nyu.edu to reserve a copy. To request scans from books on reserve please fill out the Ulivi Library Book Scan Form.

Supplemental Texts (Reference, not required to purchase, all available online on the NYU Brightspace course site and/or NYU Library)
Opera Journeys Libretto Series
Tim Carter, Understanding Italian Opera, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015
Marcia Citron, When Opera meets Film, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010

Class Assignments and Topics
All assignments listed below are due before the relevant session

Session 1 – January 27
Introduction to the course. Opera lovers in cinema: what can we learn from them? Clichés and opera extracts in movies. What is opera. Text, music, staged action

Session 2 – February 3
From the source to the ‘libretto’. Verdi, La Traviata, Act 1. Voice types and singing roles in Italian Opera
La Traviata, a brief introduction (from the Met), pp. 5-14 (35-44)
Dumas, *La dame aux Camélïas*, (novel), Oxford, Ch. 9 and 10, pp. 89-108
Dumas, Camille: A Play in Five Acts, Act 1 vv. 205-509 (scenes 7-13)

**Session 3 – February 10 - Oral Presentations of Reading Assignments**

Morality and social mores. *La Traviata*, Act 2

Dumas, Camille: A Play in Five Acts, Act 3 vv. 127-457 (scenes 4-9)
Giuseppe Verdi, *La Traviata*, Opera Journeys Libretto Series, Acts 1 and 2
Catherine Clément, *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*, Minneapolis, 1988, pp. 60-65
Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera*, “Waltzes and a Weeping Father”, pp. 376-382

Assigned screening: *La Traviata*, Acts 1 and 2

**Session 4 – February 17 - Oral Presentations of Reading Assignments - Weekly responses**

Performing opera: Acting and Singing

Grover-Friedlander, “Voice”, *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*

Assigned screening: *La Traviata* (more productions)
Assigned screening: *Becoming Traviata*
Assigned screening: Joyce DiDonato Master Class January 2016: Verdi’s “Canzone del Salice” from Otello

**Session 5 – February 24 - Paper 1 due**

Where it all began: “Speaking” and “singing”. Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* and *L’incoronazione di Poppea*

Striggio, *Orfeo, Text and Translation*

Assigned screening: *L’Orfeo*
Assigned screening: *L’incoronazione di Poppea*

**Session 6- March 3 - Oral Presentations of Reading Assignments - Weekly responses**

Singing styles. Voice types and singing roles in Baroque opera.
Feldman, “Castrato Acts”, *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*
Webster, “Aria as drama”, *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Opera*, pp. 24-49
Assigned screening: *Heavenly Voices*
Assigned screening: Excerpts from Handel's operas

**Session 7 – March 10 - Oral Presentation of Reading Assignments - Weekly responses**
Opera ingredients: Staging (and Filming) Baroque operas

Dean, “Production style in Handel's operas”, *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*
Müller, *Regietheater/Director’s Theater*, The Oxford Handbook of Opera
Explore the [ROH Interactives - Opera Machine](#)

(Spring break)

**Session 8- March 24**
The Rhythm of Comedy. Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*

Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Le nozze di Figaro* (libretto)
Wolfgang A. Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro*, Opera Journeys Libretto Series

**Session 9 – March 31 - Oral Presentations of Reading Assignments : Weekly responses**
Social Issues and the Rhythm of Comedy in Mozart's operas

More readings TBD

Assigned screening: *Le Nozze di Figaro*

**Session 10 – April 7 - Oral Presentations of Reading Assignments - Weekly responses**
The Rhythm of Comedy on stage and screen

Marcia Citron, "Visual Media", *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*
McClary, *The Passions of Peter Sellars: Staging the Music*, Introduction and Ch.1 (“American Mozart”)

Assigned screening: Excerpts from *Le Nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni, Così fan tutte*
Session 11 – April 14 – **Paper 2 due (Mozart)**

Power, victims and family ties in Verdi’s operas

Carter, *Understanding Italian Opera*, Ch. 5, pp. 151-196
Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Opera Journeys Libretto Series

Assigned screening: *Rigoletto*, excerpts from more Verdi’s operas

Session 12 – April 21 - **Oral Presentations of Reading Assignments - Weekly responses**

Sex and Race. Verdi’s *Aida*. Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*

John Graziano, “Race and Racism”, *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*
Nicholas Till, ‘An exotic and irrational entertainment’: opera and our others; opera as other*, *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*

Session 13 – April 28 - **Oral Presentations of Reading Assignments - Weekly responses**

Gaiety and Despair in the Attic: singing youth in an old tradition. Puccini, *La Bohème*

Carter, *Understanding Italian Opera*, Ch. 6, pp. 197-241
William Ashbrook, “A Brief Stage History”, in Groos, Parker, *Giacomo Puccini: La Bohème*, pp. 115-128

Session 14 – May 5 - **Group Project Presentations #6 and #7**

Sex, Race, Orientalism: Staging Operas in the 21st Century.
Cross-cultural exploitations. Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*


Assigned screening: *Madama Butterfly*
Assigned screening: *Turandot*
Session 15 – May 12 – Final exams

Suggested Co-Curricular Activities

Your Lecturer
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. 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 Symphony No. 5 on screen. Winner of the The International Rotary Club of Parma “Giuseppe Verdi” Prize, she is working on a book on the dramatic functions of the instrumental component in Verdi’s operas.

Academic Honesty & Plagiarism
As the University's policy on “Academic Integrity for Students at NYU” states: “At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others.” Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.

NYU takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. Your lecturer may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form, and may check your assignments by using TurnItIn or another software designed to detect offences against academic integrity.

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. It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

NYU Academic Integrity Policies and Guidelines
NYU Library Guides

Inclusivity Policies and Priorities
NYU’s Office of Global Programs and NYU’s global sites are committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. In order to nurture a more inclusive global university, NYU affirms the value of sharing differing perspectives and encourages open dialogue through a variety of pedagogical approaches. Our goal is to make all students feel included and welcome in all aspects of academic life, including our syllabi, classrooms, and educational activities/spaces.
Attendance Rules on Religious Holidays
Members of any religious group may, without penalty, excuse themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Students who anticipate being absent due to religious observance should notify their lecturer and Office of Academic Support in writing via email one week in advance. If examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on the day the student will be absent, the Academics Office will schedule a make-up examination or extend the deadline for assignments. Please note that an absence is only excused for the holiday but not for any days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. See also University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays.

Pronouns and Name Pronunciation (Albert and Zoom)
Students, staff, and faculty have the opportunity to add their pronouns, as well as the pronunciation of their names, into Albert. Students can have this information displayed to faculty, advisors, and administrators in Albert, NYU Brightspace, the NYU Home internal directory, as well as other NYU systems. Students can also opt out of having their pronouns viewed by their instructors, in case they feel more comfortable sharing their pronouns outside of the classroom. For more information on how to change this information for your Albert account, please see the Pronouns and Name Pronunciation website.

Students, staff, and faculty are also encouraged, though not required, to list their pronouns, and update their names in the name display for Zoom. For more information on how to make this change, please see the Personalizing Zoom Display Names website.

Moses Accommodations Statement
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented and registered disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (+1 212-998-4980 or mosecsced@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance. Accommodations for this course are managed through NYU Florence.

Bias Response
The New York University Bias Response Line provides a mechanism through which members of our community can share or report experiences and concerns of bias, discrimination, or harassing behavior that may occur within our community.

Experienced administrators in the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) receive and assess reports, and then help facilitate responses, which may include referral to another University school or unit, or investigation if warranted according to the University's existing Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy.

The Bias Response Line is designed to enable the University to provide an open forum that helps to ensure that our community is equitable and inclusive.

To report an incident, you may do so in one of three ways:

- Online using the Web Form (link)
- Email: bias.response@nyu.edu
● Phone: 212-998-2277
● Local Telephone: 055 5007277