



## Course D **ART IN OPERA**

Co-chairs: Linda Somers *and* Barbara Birchwood

Course Director: **Iain Scott**, opera expert, founder of OPERA-IS [www.opera-is.com](http://www.opera-is.com)

Artistic inspiration comes from a variety of sources. Not only do sculptors and painters appear as characters in operas (for example, the real-life sculptor Benvenuto Cellini and the fictional painter Cavaradossi in *Tosca* and Marcello in *La Bohème*), but also a number of operas have been inspired by sculptures and paintings (for example, Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*). In this ten-week course Iain will explore the ways in which Art and Opera have inter-related, sometimes in surprising ways.

### Week 1: **Sept. 15 Titian's *Mary Magdalene***

Let's start with an Opera Quiz question: which operatic character, a tenor, is first seen painting a picture depicting Mary Magdalene? It's Mario Cavaradossi, of course, in the opening scene of Puccini's *Tosca*. Well done! In this class we will explore a variety of pictorial and sculptural representations of the notorious woman from Magdala, discover some architectural secrets of the basilica of Sant'Andrea della Valle, and, moving to opera, see a variety of famous tenors demonstrating their painting as well as their singing skills.

### Week 2: **Sept. 22 Rosselli's *The Parting of the Red Sea***

Another quiz question: which operatic character, this time a baritone, is first seen while painting a picture of *The Parting of the Red Sea*? It's Marcello in the first scene of *La Bohème*. Well done, again! We will look at a variety of paintings of the famous miracle from the Exodus story and see a variety of baritones showing off their painterly credentials. We will end with Rossini's indelible operatic version of that unforgettable "Charlton Heston moment."

### Week 3: **Sept. 29 *The Duomo of Siena***

This stunning glory of medieval architecture has inspired many artists, perhaps the most surprising of whom is Richard Wagner, who, while visiting this Tuscan cathedral, was immediately inspired to depict (in music) the Grail Castle in his last and perhaps greatest music-drama *Parsifal*. We will also pay a visit to the magical gardens overlooking Ravello, on the Amalfi Coast, which inspired the magical Garden of the Flower Maidens in the same music-drama.

### Week 4: **Oct. 6 Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode***

The 18th century English printmaker and social critic William Hogarth is a fascinating and pioneering satirist. We will look carefully at one panel from his *Marriage à la Mode* series and see how it became translated, image for image, onto the operatic stage. We will also study one of his other series of paintings, *The Rake's Progress*, and see how the entire work was turned into an opera by Igor Stravinsky.

**Week 5: Oct. 13 Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus and Medusa***

Everyone who visits Florence is inevitably transfixed by this exquisite monumental bronze statue in the Loggia of the Signoria Square, one of the most innovative, celebrated, and influential works of art of the entire Renaissance. The story of how it came to be cast forms the exciting core of Cellini's brilliant *Autobiography* and, three centuries later, it became the genesis for Hector Berlioz's truly magnificent operatic extravaganza on the same segment of the great sculptor's life story.

**Week 6: Oct. 20 Georges Seurat's *La Grande Jatte***

One of the most well-known and prized possessions of the Art Institute of Chicago is this huge, Post-Impressionist canvas depicting a variety of social classes enjoying *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, painted over two years in 1884-86. This was astonishingly transformed into a Broadway musical, with a book by James Lapine and music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, exactly one hundred years later, as *Sunday in the Park with George*.

**Week 7: Oct. 27 Funerary Sculptures in Opera**

With Halloween just days away, we turn today to a ghoulish topic. Much of the work of a sculptor, from the earliest times, has been to memorialise those who have passed on. We will discover how the Greeks and other cultures created influential funerary sculptures. Along the way, we will visit some of the world's most intriguing collections of sculptures in some of the world's most famous cemeteries. This will inevitably lead us to a discussion of a variety of depictions in opera of the unexpected, supernatural arrival of a "Stone Guest" at dinner.

**Week 8: Nov. 3 Theatre in Opera**

If we add an "s" to "Art" in Opera, then we could perhaps include in this course many art forms, including ballet, poetry and the spoken word. In this class we will discuss the essential ingredients of a 17<sup>th</sup> century "drama per musica" and those of a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century "music-drama." We will then discover that some operas actually feature "a play within a play" to great advantage.

**Week 9: Nov. 10 Portraits in Opera**

Wikipedia tells us that "a portrait is a painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artistic representation of a person, in which the face and its expression is predominant. The intent is to display the likeness, personality, and even the mood of the person." We will explore the medium of portraiture in art and then move to opera, where there are several significant moments, including those in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* and also his *Un Ballo in Maschera* where, for example, a portrait drives the drama.

**Week 10: Nov. 17 Art Song in Opera**

For some, the intimate art of the "Lieder" or "Mélodie" singer is the antithesis of extravagant and exuberant opera. But in this grand finale to our course, we will learn how the creation of an "art song" becomes the central event in the greatest opera ever written about the importance of, and meaning of, "art".