The University of Western Ontario
Don Wright Faculty of Music
Department of Music Research and Composition

MUSIC 3752B—Topics in 20th-Century Opera

Course Instructor: Kyle Hutchinson – khutch8@uwo.ca
Office: TC323
Office Hours: Mondays 10:30am–11:20am, or via email
Course Schedule: Mondays 9:30am–10:30am, Wednesdays 9:30am–11:30am, MB140

The prerequisite for this course is Music 2711F/G. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustments to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Overview

Modernism, particularly as it applies to music in the quickly changing landscape of the early twentieth century, is not an easy term to describe. Ezra Pound’s famous tenet “Make it New” may seem to offer some clarification, but, then again, what does it mean for something to be “new”? This course is structured conceptually around the question of what operatic modernism means in the first part of the twentieth century (roughly 1900–1930). In probing this question, we will look primarily at two facets of opera, namely, the music and the drama, and focus on what aspects of these operatic elements might be considered modernistic. While this answer may be easier for some composers, the interest of this course lies with examples where the answer is not entirely clear-cut: Richard Strauss, for instance, was often criticized for reverting to a more simplistic tonal syntax after the more harmonically adventurous Elektra; but is this truly the case? Or where do the extended tonal idioms—neither atonal, nor entirely based in diatonicism—of composers such as Debussy, Bartók, and Schoenberg (among other composers) fit? The goal is not necessarily to give a definitive answer of what is or is not modernist, but to engage with this challenging question through the examination of musical and dramatic elements through several works in the early twentieth century. Our discussions of modernism will also lead to consideration of societal and cultural practices that inform and/or relate to the operas in question (i.e. questions of gender in Salome, questions of philosophy in Parsifal etc.).

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation – 10%
Short Assignments (x2) – 30%
In-Class Opera Presentation – 15%
Weekly Discussion Questions – 10%
Final Paper & Presentation – 35% (Rough Draft = 10%, Presentation = 5%, Final Version = 20%)

Course Grade 100%
1. Since most of this course is based on readings and class discussions, attendance and participation in all classes is imperative. Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 2% from the Attendance and Participation portion of the grade.

2. There will be two assignments throughout the term. These will involve some study of a scene or section of an opera, including a prose discussion of the music. Further instructions will be handed out separately.

3. Once in the term each student will serve as our “informant” on the opera under discussion that week, giving a presentation of roughly ten minutes that covers either the history/plot of the opera (Mondays), or an overview of its musical style (Wednesdays).

4. Students will submit a discussion question each week pertinent to the readings/opera under discussion. These will be used to get the conversation rolling!

5. A final paper of ca. 2500 words will be developed in consultation with the instructor. Students will present their (in-progress) work in the last two weeks of classes. More details will be distributed separately.

**Required Materials**

Scores and recordings of the operas in question will be on course reserve in the library. Additionally, many (almost all) of the scores are available on IMSLP. For scores in the public domain, I will post PDF files of the relevant scenes/sections to the course webpage. Likewise, readings will be posted to the course webpage. Students should come prepared with copies of the scores they can annotate (either photocopies, or printed), access to the required readings, and have listened to the (assigned sections of the) operas we are studying each week.

### Schedule

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<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Introduction: What is Modernism?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Looking Back (Historic Precedent, Review of Operatic Conventions/Structure, Review of Common-Practice Syntax)</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Wagner – <em>Parsifal</em></td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Strauss – <em>Elektra</em></td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Puccini - <em>Turandot</em> A1 Due</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Schoenberg – <em>Erwartung</em></td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Debussy – <em>Pelléas et Melisande</em> Paper Proposal Due (email)</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Bartók – <em>Bluebeard’s Castle</em></td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Individual Paper Consultations (Mon. 10am–1pm, Wed. 10am–12pm) A2 Due</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Strauss – Late Operas (<em>Die Ägyptische Helena, Die Liebe der Danae</em>)</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Presentations Paper Rough Draft Due</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
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1 Subject to change depending on the size of the class and other factors (such as performances of early 20th-century operas at Western or in the London area).
Notes:

Mental Health: Students that are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western [https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/](https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accessibility: For issues concerning accessibility on campus, please visit [http://www.accessibility.uwo.ca](http://www.accessibility.uwo.ca)

Religious Accommodation: Students may be excused to observe a religious holy day of his/her faith without penalty provided they notify the instructor in advance. Students will be held responsible for material covered in their absence and each student shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up missed work.

Accommodation for Medical Illness: Students are responsible for making up any missed classes or assignments as soon as possible. In order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing more than 30% of the student’s overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation in the form of a completed and appropriately signed Student Medical Certificate (SMC) indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities, or the equivalent documentation for non-medical or compassionate grounds.

Students seeking academic consideration must communicate with their instructors no later than 24 hours after the end of the period covered by either the self-reported absence or SMC, or immediately upon their return following a documented absence, to clarify how they will be expected to fulfil the academic expectations they may have missed during the absence. Documentation, if required, shall be submitted to the Office of the Associate Dean, Undergraduate (TC210).

Note that the new Self-Reporting Absence Portal may not be used for requesting academic relief for work worth more than 30%, or for Final Exams scheduled during the official examination period. Students are directed to read the full Senate policy on accommodation for medical illness at the following website: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Consideration_for_absences.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Consideration_for_absences.pdf)

Accommodation will be granted for medical illness or compassionate grounds for work worth 30% or less of the total course grade to medical illness or compassionate grounds, if an online absence report is submitted using the new Self-Reporting Absence Portal, or if documentation is voluntarily submitted to the Associate Dean’s office and the Associate Dean deems that accommodation is warranted. In most of such cases, students will be given extra time to make up for missed work.

Plagiarism: Assignments are to be completed independently. Submission of work with which you have received help from someone else (other than the course instructor or TA) is an example of plagiarism. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, as found at: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)