

Don Wright Faculty of Music, Western University

RESPONDING TO MODERNISM ON THE OPERATIC STAGE

MUSIC 3752A: TOPICS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY OPERA
Course Syllabus – Fall 2021

Course meetings: Mondays, 9:30–10:30 a.m./Wednesdays, 9:30–11:30 a.m.
Instructor: Dr. Eva Branda
Office hours: Mondays, 11:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. or by appointment (TC–323)
Email: ebranda@uwo.ca
Website: <https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>

Prerequisites:

Music 1710F/G and Music 2710F/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 adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description:

Modernism dominated Western art music – and indeed, art in general – throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Whether composers thought of themselves as “modernists” or “anti-modernists,” those who were active during the century’s early decades inevitably felt compelled to position themselves in relation to this artistic movement. It is often taken for granted that the movement ended with the onset of World War II; however, as we shall see, modernist ideals continued to shape musical thought and composition well beyond mid-century.

With some contextual help from musicologists and, in some cases, from the composers themselves, we will investigate the impact of modernism on twentieth-century music, focusing our discussion on one genre: opera. At course meetings, we will study excerpts from a number of selected operatic works by a variety of composers, considering, in particular, the ways in which these composers either embraced or rejected modernist ideology. In addition, each student will have the opportunity to explore a topic of his/her own choosing in the final paper.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Describe with precision the musical features of the operas covered in class and place these works into historical context
2. Explain the relationships between studied works and modernist thought
3. Engage critically with a variety of primary and secondary sources and communicate ideas effectively both verbally (in presentations and class discussions) and in prose (on the exam and on written assignments)

* It is hoped that this course will also encourage students to take more of an interest in recently composed music.

Required Materials:

None. Readings have been posted to the course website as PDFs. (Many of the articles that we will examine may also be accessed electronically on JSTOR.) Recordings will be available through Naxos Music Library. In addition to the article readings, the following source will serve as a course textbook:

Taruskin, Richard. *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Vols. 4 and 5: *Music in the Early Twentieth Century* and *Music in the Late Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. (NOT the college edition)

You will not need to purchase these volumes, since you have access to them as electronic resources through the library catalogue.

Evaluation:

Attendance and Participation	12%
Weekly Responses	12% (due on select Wednesdays; see course schedule)
In-Class Presentation	15% (scheduled individually throughout the semester)
Working Bibliography	3% (October 20)
Essay Abstract	3% (November 10)
Final Essay	25% (December 8)
Final Exam	30% (TBA)

Preparation:

This course is conducted as a seminar. Each week, we will investigate a particular topic relating to our course theme. In preparation for Monday classes, you will usually be required to complete a section of reading from volume 4 or 5 of Taruskin’s *Oxford History of Western Music*, which is intended to give you some background. For some Monday classes, the reading will instead be taken from *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, edited by Mervyn Cooke. (All required readings from this source will be posted in PDF to the course website.) Wednesday classes will be devoted to the discussion of a variety of articles and to in-class presentations. On select Wednesdays, you will be required to hand in a written response to the reading. You will also need to study and become very familiar with the required listening, which will usually be considered to some degree at both Monday and Wednesday classes.

EVALUATION IN DETAIL

Attendance and Participation:

The success of this seminar will depend in large part on your contributions to class discussions. Make sure that you attend every one of the classes (attendance will be taken) and that you come prepared, having completed the required readings and listening. While doing the readings, you should be thinking about the ways in which the author’s ideas relate to the course theme. Keep track of any aspects of the readings that you found to be particularly thought-provoking, intriguing, or insightful. Likewise, make note of anything that you considered to be confusing/difficult to understand and/or anything with which you disagreed. Take the same approach when listening to the assigned musical examples for each week. In class, you need to

be willing to offer your thoughts/opinions and to ask questions of others. We should all strive to create an environment in class where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas. Regular attendance and a curiosity for the topics at hand are essential in order for you to be successful in this course. Each unexcused absence (where no medical documentation is provided) will have a negative impact on your attendance and participation grade.

Weekly Responses:

On six Wednesdays (listed in the course schedule below), you will be required to submit a short written response to the day's reading. Your response should be between 250 and 350 words in length and should develop some aspect of the assigned article in a bit of detail. Avoid simply reiterating or summarizing the author's main points. Strive, instead, to make meaningful connections to some of the topics discussed in the course and to communicate your opinion on the author's position. These weekly responses are designed to ensure that you have read/thought about the readings before coming to class and to give quieter students the opportunity to share their ideas with me. These responses must be uploaded to the course website before class and submitted to me in hard copy at the start of class. Electronic submissions will not be accepted. Late assignments will only be accepted in the case of illness (where medical documentation is provided) or under extenuating circumstances.

In-Class Presentation:

At the start of the semester, you must schedule an in-class presentation to be delivered at one of the Wednesday classes. The presentation should be approximately 15 minutes in length. You will be required to provide an in-depth look at a twentieth-century opera not covered in class (presentation topics are listed below), introducing the work to the rest of the class and drawing attention to the ways in which it relates to topics being discussed in the course. This will involve some additional research beyond the assigned readings. You may use any kind of audio and visual aids that you think will make your presentation more engaging, including recordings, dramatic re-enactments, live performances, etc. The presentation also has a written component (a handout or PowerPoint presentation/Prezi) that will be submitted to me and made available to the other students in the class.

Working Bibliography:

In order to make sure that you begin researching your final paper topic early, you will be required to submit a properly-formatted working bibliography prepared in Chicago style with a minimum of ten scholarly sources on it as well as bibliographic citations for any scores that you will be examining. Your bibliography must reflect a prudent and critical eye for good sources.

Essay Abstract:

You must write an abstract of about 350 words, providing a concise and well-crafted summary of the main argument that you wish to make in your paper. The abstract should give the reader a sense of the focus and scope of your paper as well as the ways in which your study builds on existing scholarship.

Final Essay:

The final essay should be approximately 8 to 10 pages in length and it must relate closely to some aspect of the course. Many essay topics will suggest themselves as you complete the

weekly readings/listening and engage in class discussions. You are strongly encouraged to choose a topic that interests you and one for which there are sufficient scholarly materials. If you are stuck, please come see me with at least a rough idea of what you would like to do/where your main interests lie. Avoid selecting a piece that was discussed in detail in class. Your approach may be more contextual or analytical, depending on your interest.

Final Exam:

The final exam will contain a series of short and long answer questions to which you will be required to write thoughtful responses. These questions will draw upon some of the main themes and ideas that were explored in the readings and during in-class discussions. The final exam will also have a listening component to test your familiarity with the required musical examples.

COURSE POLICIES

Communication with Course Instructor:

If you have any questions or comments related to the content, organization, or any aspect of the course, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am available for consultation during my regular office hours on Mondays from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. or by appointment. (Whereby can be used as an alternate platform for communication if you wish: www.whereby.com/musicchat.) You may also get in touch with me by email (ebranda@uwo.ca) and can expect to get a response within 24 hours.

Classroom Etiquette:

During class, please be courteous to your classmates, avoiding any kind of behaviour that may be disruptive or distracting to your colleagues. Make an effort to arrive on time, and be respectful to those who are speaking/contributing to class discussions. Cell phones must be turned off, and laptops may be used for note-taking and accessing course articles/scores ONLY.

Format and Submission Policies for Written Work:

The Final Essay must be type-written and double-spaced in 12-point font, with 1-inch margins. All other written work may be single spaced. When submitting an assignment, include your name, your student number, the course name and number, and the date on the assignment. All written work must be uploaded to the course website by the start of class and submitted in hard copy at the start of class (9:30 a.m.) on the due date.

Late Policy:

Late Weekly Responses will not be accepted (see above for details). All late Essay Abstracts, Working Bibliographies, and Final Essays are to be submitted to the course website as well and will be penalized at a rate of 5% per day. (Any work submitted after 9:30 a.m. on the due date will be considered late and will be subject to the late penalty.) Assignments will not be accepted after one week.

Grading scale: A+=90-100%, A=80-89%, B=70-79%, C=60-69%, D=50-59%, F=0-49%.

Citations, Academic Offences, and Turnitin:

A crucial component of academic writing is acknowledging your sources. Failing to acknowledge the scholars who have influenced the development of your ideas is dishonest. Borrowing another scholar's ideas without proper acknowledgement of its source is plagiarism, a serious offense in university. Any sources that you use *must* be documented appropriately. Please consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* when formatting your footnotes and bibliography.

Submission of work with which you have received help from someone else (other than the course instructor or TA) is an example of plagiarism, which is considered 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/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergraduate.pdf. If you are unsure of whether or not you are committing a Scholastic Offence, please contact me immediately.

Turnitin.com will be used in this course for the Weekly Responses, Essay Abstract, and Final Essay. All papers submitted to Turnitin.com will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between the University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Mental Health & Wellness:

Students that are in emotional/mental distress should refer to the Health and Wellness at Western page (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help or to go to the Wellness Education Centre located in UCC room 76. **Students in crisis in need of immediate care are directed to go directly to Student Health Services in UC11 or to click on the green “I Need Help Now” button on the Health and Wellness page above.**

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

Students work with Accessible Education Western (AEW, formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

Religious Accommodation:

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

<http://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART I: THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: POSITIONING ONESELF IN RELATION TO MODERNIST IDEOLOGY

Week 1 (September 8)

Introductions

Read: No required reading.

Week 2 (September 13 and 15) / (Response to Albright due on Wednesday)

Late Romanticism or Modernism? Some Definitions

Read: Albright, Daniel. *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Chapter 1 “Introduction,” pp. 1–22. (For Wednesday)

Chew, Geoffrey. “The Rusalka as an Endangered Species: Modernist Aspects and Intertexts of Kvapil’s and Dvořák’s *Rusalka*.” *Hudební Věda* 40 (2003): 371–379. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* (1859) – Prelude and “Liebestod” (For Monday) and Dvořák’s *Rusalka* (1901) – Overture and “Song to the Moon” (For Wednesday)

Presentation Topics: None.

Week 3 (September 20 and 22) / (Response due on Wednesday)

An Early “Modernist” Opera: Fairy Tales and Symbolism

Read: Taruskin, Vol. 4, Chapter 2 “Getting Rid of Glue,” pp. 76–96 “Impressionism” and “Symbolism” (For Monday)

Goehr, Lydia. “Radical Modernism and the Failure of Style: Philosophical Reflections on Maeterlinck-Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*.” *Representations* 74, no. 1 (2001): 55–82. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Act IV, Scene 4 (1902)

Presentation Topics: Humperdink’s *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893), Ravel’s *L’Heure Espagnole* (1907–9), Fauré’s *Pénélope* (1907–12)

Week 4 (September 27 and 29) / (No response due this week)

The Competing Pressures of Nationalism and “Progress”

Read: Taruskin, Vol. 4, Chapter 7 “Socially Validated Maximalism,” pp. 421–445 “The Oldest Twentieth-Century Composer?” “Speech Tunelets,” “A Music-Dramatic Laboratory,” and “Research vs. Communication” (For Monday)

Wolff, Larry. “The Operatic Tragedy of Central Europe.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 4 (2006): 683–695. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Janáček’s *Káťa Kabanová*, Act III, Scene 2 (1920–21)

Presentation Topics: Strauss’s *Salome* (1903–5), Strauss’s *Elektra* (1908), Bartók’s *Bluebeard’s Castle* (1911)

Week 5 (October 4 and 6) / (Response due on Wednesday)

Intersections between Modernism and the Avant-Garde: The Concept of the Anti-Opera

Read: Taruskin, Vol. 4, Chapter 9 “Lost – or Rejected – Illusions,” pp. 495–506 “Breaching the Fourth Wall,” “Art as Plaything,” and “A New Attitude Toward the ‘Classics?’” (For Monday)

Pisani, Michael V. “‘A Kapustnik’ in the American Opera House: Modernism and Prokofiev’s *Love for Three Oranges*.” *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (1997): 487–515. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Prokofiev’s *Love for Three Oranges*, Act III, Scene 3 (1919)

Presentation Topics: Janáček’s *The Excursion of Mr. Brouček to the Moon* (1908–1917), Shostakovich’s *The Nose* (1927–28), Poulenc’s *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1944)

Week 6 (No class – October 11) / (October 13) / (Response due on Wednesday)

Anti-Modernists?

Read: Wilson, Alexandra, “Modernism and the Machine Woman in Puccini’s *Turandot*.” *Music & Letters* 86, no. 3 (2005): 432–451. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Puccini’s *Turandot*, “In questa reggia” and “Nessun dorma” (1924)

Presentation Topics: Holst’s *The Wandering Scholar* (1929–30), Mascagni’s *Nerone* (1935), Vaughan Williams’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1949–52)

Week 7 (October 18 and 20) / (Working bibliography due on Wednesday)

Are Modernism and Politics Reconcilable? Opera in Times of Intense Persecution

Read: Taruskin, Vol. 4, Chapter 13 “Music and Totalitarian Society,” pp. 743–796 (whole chapter). (For Monday)

Kater, Michael H. “The Revenge of the Fathers: The Demise of Modern Music at the End of the Weimar Republic.” *German Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (1992): 295–315. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Krása’s *Brundibár* Act II, Scenes 6 and 7 (1938), and Hindemith’s *Mathis der Maler*, Tableau VI, Scene 3 (1934)

Presentation Topics: Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1930–32), Prokofiev’s *War and Peace* (1942), Ullman’s *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (1943)

Week 8 (October 25 and 27) / (Response due on Wednesday)

The Expressionists: Modernist Opera Reaches its Pinnacle?

Read: Taruskin, Vol. 4, Chapter 9 “Lost – or Rejected – Illusions,” pp. 506–526 “‘How’ vs. ‘What,’” and “Putting Things ‘in Quotes.’” (For Monday)

Meyler, Bernadette. “Adorno’s Shifting *Wozzeck*.” In *Modernism and Opera*, edited by Richard Begam and Matthew Wilson Smith, 148–85. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Berg’s *Wozzeck*, Act I, Scene 1 and Act III, Scene 3 (1925)

Presentation Topics: Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* (1909), Schoenberg’s *Moses und Aron* (1932), Berg’s *Lulu* (1935)

Fall Reading Week (November 1 to 7 – no classes)

**PART II: THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY:
EMBRACING OR REJECTING THE IDEALS OF A PREVIOUS GENERATION?**

Week 9 (November 8 and 10) / (Essay abstract due on Wednesday)

A Return to Earlier Aesthetics: Neoclassicism and Opera

Read: Walton, Chris. “Neo-classical Opera.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, edited by Mervyn Cooke, 105–122. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. (For Monday)

Lindenberger, Herbert. “Stravinsky, Auden, and the Midcentury Modernism of *The Rake’s Progress*,” In *Modernism and Opera*, eds. Richard Begam and Matthew Wilson Smith, 271–89. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Excerpts from Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress*, Act III, Scene 2: “Graveyard” scene (1951)

Presentation Topics: Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier* (1910), Krenek’s *Johnny spielt auf* (1925), Weill’s *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928)

Week 10 (November 15 and 17) / (Response due this week)

A “Modern” Hero: Opera as Social Commentary

Read: Taruskin, Vol. 5, Chapter 5 “Standoff (I),” pp. 221–259 (whole chapter). (For Monday)

Chowrimootoo, Christopher. “Sentimentality under Erasure in *Peter Grimes*.” In *Middlebrow Modernism: Britten’s Operas and the Great Divide*, 30–62. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Britten’s *Peter Grimes*, Act II, Scene 1 and concluding chorus (1944–45)

Presentation Topics: Britten’s *Billy Budd* (1951), Britten’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), Britten’s *Owen Wingrave* (1970)

Week 11 (November 22 and 24) / (No response due this week)

Tonality as Novelty: A Postmodern Response to Modernism

Read: Kramer, Jonathan D. “The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism.” In *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, edited by Joseph Auner and Judy Lochhead, 13–26. New York: Routledge, 2002. (For Monday)

Reynolds, Christopher. “*Porgy and Bess*: ‘An American *Wozzeck*.’” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1–28 (For Wednesday)

Listen: Del Tredici’s *Final Alice*, “Acrostic Song” (1976) and Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*, “Summertime” (1935)

Presentation Topics: Joplin’s *Treemonisha* (1910), Weill’s *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (1928–29), Bernstein’s *Candide* (1956)

Week 12 (November 29 and December 1) / (No response due this week)

A Harmonious Avant-Garde? Minimalism and Postminimalism in Opera

Read: Ashby, Arved. “Minimalist Opera.” 244–266. In *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, edited by Mervyn Cooke, 105–122. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. (For Monday)

Bernard, Jonathan W. “Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality in American Music.” *American Music* 21, no. 1 (2003): 112–133. (For Wednesday)

Listen: Adams’s *Nixon in China* (1987), Act I, Scene 1 “News” and Act I, Scene 3 “Ladies and gentlemen” and “Cheers!”

Presentation Topics: Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach* (1975–76), Glass’s *The Voyage* (1992), Reich’s *The Cave*

Week 13 (December 6 and 8) / (Final essay due on Wednesday)

What Next? Canadian Perspectives and Opera in the Twenty-First Century

Read: Williams, Alistair. “Ageing of the New: The Museum of Musical Modernism.” In *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, edited by Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople, 506–538. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. (For Monday)

Listen: Somers’s *Louis Riel*, Act I Sugar Aria and Riel’s Soliloquy (1967); excerpts from Adès’s *The Tempest* (2004)

FINAL EXAM PERIOD (December 10–21)

* Course syllabus may be subject to minor changes.