

HISTORY OF MUSIC

Opera, Globalisation and Identities

Academic Year: 2023-2024

Degree: B.A. **Global Humanities**

Credits: **6 cfu**

Module convenor: **Giuliano Danieli**

INFORMATION ON THE EXAM

Format: **Written exam**

Duration: **2 hours**

GENERAL GUIDELINES

The exam is made up of two parts: in the first (90 minutes), you will have to respond to three compulsory questions (10 points each). In the second (30 minutes), you will have to analyse a short video excerpt from an opera (5 points).

The exam should be taken in person. **Please bring your own sheets and pen for the written exam.**

Only in *exceptional circumstances* remote written exams will be arranged (and special sessions will be organised). If you are unable to attend the exam in person, please make sure that you contact me (giuliano.danieli@uniroma1.it) well in advance.

EXAM QUESTIONS

PART 1, 90 minutes.

Questions 1, 2 and 3 are compulsory. Each answer should not exceed the limit of 500 words. There is not a minimum number of words you should write – just make sure that you develop a compelling overall argument in your response, and that your points are supported by relevant examples (when required). These questions will focus on general topics addressed in my classes (non-attending students will be able to respond these questions by studying the course readings and watching the operas uploaded on Drive). This is an example of what you might find in the exam:

QUESTION: Musicologist Philip Brett has written that Benjamin Britten's "*Peter Grimes* is about a man who is persecuted because he is different". Please discuss this point. You should briefly contextualise Britten's opera and provide at least one example that supports the idea that *Peter Grimes* focuses on a marginalised, socially excluded subject.

TIPS - HOW TO ANSWER:

1. You should shortly mention the connections between the genesis of the opera and Britten's peculiar social position (as a pacifist and homosexual, living in bellicose years and in a society that condemned homosexuality), which might have encouraged him to write an opera on a "persecuted", socially excluded person – as is Peter Grimes.
2. You should discuss the ambiguous characterisation of the opera's protagonist (as emerging from the libretto and/or from the music), both as a violent person and as a dreamer; Peter's conflict with "the Borough"; Peter's self-destructive desire to embrace the Borough's values, while being led to madness by these values themselves.
3. You should provide at least *one* example that supports the previous points. The opera's *Prologue* (the Trial), for instance, contains a number of musical elements that introduce the conflict between Peter and the surrounding community. The Borough is associated to violent and grotesque music that conveys ideas of suffocating chattering and aggressiveness [you are not expected to provide detailed musical analyses in your discussion, nor to use technical terms]; however, if you want / you are able to comment on the "hectic

rhythmical patterns”, the “brutal sounds of wind instruments and percussions in the orchestra” etc. you are encouraged to do so]; by contrast, in the first part of the scene Peter sings gently, and is accompanied by the delicate sound of strings in the orchestra. In the final climax of the scene, however, Peter’s singing becomes more hysterical, and shows the consequences of people’s gossips and prejudices on the socially excluded subject.

QUESTION: In general terms, what is the difference between aria and recitativo in 18th and early 19th century Italian opera? Please illustrate the salient musical, verbal, and dramatic features of arias and recitativi.

TIPS: read the question carefully; you should discuss all the aspects mentioned in it, i.e., you should present the main 1. musical; 2. verbal; and 3. dramatic features that differentiate arias from recitativi. Examples are not required here, but your response should be quite detailed.

MODEL ANSWER which scored 10/10:

Music, operatic musical texts (scores) and melodies undoubtedly play a crucial role in articulating different dramatic parts. One common and fundamental articulation is the alternation between varying moments of action and moments of reflection and stasis, depending on differing musical features, rhythms, and paces. Essentially, the monumental musical moments are what we call arias: in these musical pieces there can be witnessed great feelings of one character’s emotional sphere, and subjectivity and introspection are foregrounded. Arias are usually made of one single metre that lasts for the whole piece: this is meant to reflect a more structured organization, even in terms of rhythmical pulse, which tends to be more regular. Conversely, recitatives should render those dramatic moments where the story is being told and therefore dialogues and speeches are taking place on the stage. As a consequence, the music must follow the rhythm of the speech in everyday life: in fact, there is no regularity in the metrical sphere since recitatives can be composed of many different metres that enable the audience to follow the evolution of the narrative in a speech-like style. Along these lines, the instrumental accompaniment in this case highlights the action and what the singers are delivering with their lines.

To sum up, arias and recitatives are the two elements of the musical dramaturgy that quintessentially create the operatic performance in its most complete sense: without their constant alternation of action and stasis, many operas would not be able to be enjoyed and, essentially, exist.

PART 2, 30 minutes.

Question 4 is for extra points. If you do not respond to it – or if your answer is wrong – you will still be able to get the highest mark, 30/30 (by scoring 10/10 in the three compulsory questions in the first part). However, with this question you might score additional points (up to 5) and increase your final mark. If you did well in the other questions AND in question 4, you can get *30 cum laude*.

This question will focus on a short audio-visual clip taken from the operas discussed during the course (see below the list of operas that you should watch, and that you might find at the exam). I will screen the clip, and you will be asked to:

- Say where the clip comes from (title of the opera, composer, and other general information you might want to add – e.g. when/in which century the opera was composed).
- Give a general comment about the clip: you can focus on whatever aspects you find interesting (the music and/or the staging and/or the verbal text etc.).

Your answer should not exceed the limit of 300 words.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE EXAM

The questions will be the same for attending and non-attending students. However, **if you have attended my classes**, you will be able to respond to my questions by studying the lectures’ notes

very attentively (of course, you can use the readings on Drive as supporting materials, but the main focus should be on the lectures' contents).

If you have not attended my classes, you are expected to study ALL the readings I've uploaded on Drive – otherwise you won't be able to answer my questions. You will also be expected to have seen all the operas I've discussed.

The lectures' power-points, the readings and the videos are all available on Drive.

These are the readings (*all* of them are compulsory for non-attending students; attending students are expected to read the articles highlighted with the asterisks):

00 Howard Mayer Brown, Ellen Rosand et al., 'Opera', *Grove Music Online*.

Required reading:

- 01* Tim Carter, 'What is Opera?', in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, edited by Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 15-32.
- 02* Tim Carter, *Understanding Italian Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 1-25.
- 03* Laurel E. Zeiss, 'The dramaturgy of opera', in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 248-279.
- 04* Heather Hadlock, 'Opera and gender studies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, edited by Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 352-378.
- 05 Joseph Kerman, 'Verdi and the Undoing of Women', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 18/1, 2006, pp. 21-31.
- 06* Kate Bailey, 'Visions of Women: Salome and Dresden', in *Opera: Passion, Power and Politics*, edited by Kate Bailey (London: V&A Publishing, 2017), pp. 202-219.
- 07 Linda and Michael Hutcheon, 'Singing the Female Body. Richard Strauss's *Salome*', in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, edited by Mary Ann Smart, pp. 204-221.
- 08* Alexandra Wilson, 'Puccini and Women', *Calibano*, 1, 2023.
- 09* Ping-hui Liao, "'Of Writing Words for Music Which Is Already Made": *Madama Butterfly*, *Turandot*, an Orientalism', *Cultural Critique*, 16 (1990), pp 31-59.
- 10* Nicholas Till, "'An exotic and irrational entertainment': opera and our others; opera as other", in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, edited by Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 409-446.
- 11* W. Anthony Sheppard, 'Exoticism', in *Oxford Handbook of Opera*, edited by Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 795-816.
- 12* Benjamin Britten, 'Introduction'; Peter Pears, 'Neither a Hero Nor a Villain', in *Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes*, edited by Philip Brett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 148-152.
- 13* Philip Brett, "'Grimes Is at His Exercise": Sex, Politics, and Violence in the Librettos of Peter Grimes', in *Siren Songs. Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, edited by Mary Ann Smart (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 237-250.
- 14 Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise* (New York: Picador, 2007), chapter on Peter Grimes, pp. 317-328 (ebook version).
- 15* Marina Frolova-Walker, 'The Language of National Style', in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, edited by Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 156-176.
- 16* Richard Taruskin, 'Musorgsky versus Musorgsky: The Versions of Boris Godunov', in *Musorgsky. Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 201-299.
- 17 Francesco Izzo, 'Censorship', in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, edited by Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 818-835.
- 18* Louise K. Stein, 'How Opera Traveled', in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, edited by Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 843-862.
- 19 Winton Dean, *Handel's Operas. 1704-1726* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 168-205.
- 20* Giovanni Andrea Sechi, 'The Neapolitan Version of *Rinaldo*: The Stages of its Rediscovery', from the CD booklet of *Rinaldo*, music by Handel and Leo, Dynamic CDS7831.03, pp. 18-25.

These are the opera videos (see Drive folder) that ALL students are expected to watch, with particular focus on the scenes we discussed in class (see the Syllabus for further details):

VERDI, *La traviata*, 1853 (dir. Carsen – Teatro la Fenice, 2004)

STRAUSS, *Salome*, 1905 (dir. Michieletto – Teatro alla Scala, 2021)

PUCCINI, *Madama Butterfly*, 1904 (dir. Leiser, Caurier – Royal Opera House 2017)

BRITTEN, *Peter Grimes*, 1945 (dir. Jones – Teatro alla Scala, 2012)

HANDEL, *Rinaldo*, 1711 (dir. Carsen – Glyndebourne Festival, 2011)

MUSORGSKY, *Boris Godunov*, 1869 (dir. Bieito – Bayerische Staatsoper 2016)

If the English subtitles are not embedded in the videos, please read the English translation in the librettos I've uploaded in the Drive Folder "Opera Librettos".

PLAGIARISM POLICY

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. In the event of suspected or confirmed cases of plagiarism, your exam will be invalidated and you will have to re-sit the exam.