



# **Syllabus**

## **From Page to Stage: Transforming Great Literature Into Opera**

**Fall 2021, Tuesdays 10:00—11:40am**

**Kip Cranna, Dramaturg Emeritus  
San Francisco Opera  
kcranna@gmail.com**

As the Italians say, "Prima le parole:" The Words Come First! Great works of opera often stem from great works of literature. It can be fascinating to witness the transformation. San Francisco Opera's Dramaturg Emeritus Kip Cranna will explore how composers use their personal artistic instincts to find inspiration in works by great writers, reimagining their sources in intriguing new ways. Video examples (with English subtitles) will compare literary, film, and operatic versions of classic and more contemporary works, illustrating the sometimes unpredictable outcomes when gifted composers (and their librettists) confront gifted authors.

### **Class 1 (Sep. 14): Shakespeare at the Opera, Part One**

More operas are based on works of The Bard than on those of any other writer. Besides the famous adaptations by Verdi, we'll check out Shakespearean music dramas by other well-known composers like Berlioz, Britten, Gounod, and Wagner, and some lesser-known works by Antonio Salieri, Ambroise Thomas, and the contemporary composer Thomas Adès.

### **Class 2 (Sep. 21): Shakespeare at the Opera, Part Two**

We continue our journey exploring Shakespeare-inspired operas.

### **Class 3 (Sep. 28): Selling Your Soul at the Opera:**

#### **The Faust Myth on Stage and Screen**

A deal with the devil! Countless works of theater, opera and cinema are steeped in the myth of Faust. He sold his soul for youth, wealth, power, glory, or knowledge, depending on who tells the story, which also determines whether Faust goes to Heaven or Hell at the end. Numerous video examples will help us explore the rich and potent world of Faustian operas and other dramas. (Sometimes the devil is a woman!)

#### **Class 4 (Oct. 5): Figaro, Figaro!**

French playwright Pierre Caron de Beaumarchais wrote three plays featuring a clever trickster named Figaro: *The Barber of Seville*, *The Marriage of Figaro* and the lesser-known sequel *The Guilty Mother*--works that span the tumultuous years of the French Revolution. Rossini and Mozart's beloved masterpieces based on the first two are well known, but there are other operatic adaptations as well, including one by the nefarious P.D.Q. Bach! Let's examine Figaro's exploits on page and stage and watch this defiant figure come to life in a variety of ways.

#### **Class 5 (Oct. 12): Finding Inspiration in the Romantic Era**

Nineteenth-Century composers turned to novels, plays, the Bible, and history itself to find exotic, sentimental, exciting and emotive stimulus for their operas. Works like Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Verdi's *Nabucco*, *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, and *Don Carlo*, and Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, all have noteworthy literary sources well worth getting to know.

#### **Class 6 (Oct. 19): Pardon My French**

French operas have particularly rich and varied sources in literature that are often less well-known than the musical dramas inspired by them. We'll look at the literary backgrounds of works by French composers such as Gluck, Bizet, Massenet, Berlioz, Offenbach, and Saint-Saëns.

#### **Class 7 (Oct. 26): Puccini and Friends**

Always near the top of the list of audience favorites, the operas of Puccini are all much more famed than their literary sources. We'll look at the transformation from page to stage that produced beloved operas like *Manon Lescaut*, *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, *The Girl of the Golden West*, and *Turandot*, and get an insight into the artistic process of "Verismo" composers like Puccini and his Italian contemporaries.

#### **Class 8 (Nov. 2): The Twentieth Century and Beyond: Finding Things to Sing About**

Composers of our own time have adapted literary classics like *Moby Dick*, *Billy Budd*, *Death in Venice*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, to name just a few. Others have turned to more recent novels like *The Bonesetter's Daughter* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. Let's take a close look at how these words on the page become the emotional sparks that fly when great singers give them voice.