



Brightview at Rockville, Spring 2023

Thursdays, 1:00 to 3:00 PM

Roger Brunyate, instructor

Op Pop!

THE FIVE OPERAS IN THIS COURSE are among the half-dozen most often produced in the world today (the sixth is *Tosca*, another Puccini). In the first hour of each class, we shall look at excerpts in traditional productions to see and hear what has made them so popular. But their pop status also comes with risks: that the stagings will grow stale, the performers will lose their immediacy, and younger audiences may feel disconnected. So in the second hour of each class, we will look at strategies for avoiding this, a different one in each case.

NOTE: My decision to focus on the most popular operas means that I am inevitably returning to works I have visited in other courses. However, I am making every effort not to include any excerpts I have used before, or to show them in different versions if I do. rb.



Magic Flute

April 13. Mozart's *Magic Flute* [#3 in popularity] has everything: stage magic, a fairy-tale plot, and lots of comedy, offset by the serious Enlightenment values that underpin all. While

a cocktail like this can never lose its savor, newer productions vary the proportions of the ingredients or the glass in which to serve them.

The Barber

April 20. Rossini's *Barber of Seville* [#6] is the quintessential farce, in which the hero enlists the help of the wily barber Figaro to win the girl, and has to assume a different disguise in each act to get past her jealous guardian. A piece that depends only on sharp acting and detailed rehearsal hardly needs rethinking.



La Bohème

May 11. Puccini's *La Bohème* [#4] is another romantic tragedy like *La Traviata*, but peopled with penniless students in the garrets of Paris. Puccini's sense of dramatic pathos is incomparable, but probably no opera suffers more from over-elaboration and under-rehearsed routine—though many recent productions address this.



La Traviata

April 27. Verdi's *La Traviata* is the most often performed opera today. For reasons, we need look no farther than its tragic story of an impossible love and the endless flow of melody from Verdi's pen. Yet it is an opera that can easily be swamped by its *mise-en-scène*, and the best productions are the most restrained.

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Carmen

May 4. Bizet's *Carmen* [#2] is another opera whose essence can be lost in the spectacle of its grand opera trappings. Yet Bizet intended a leaner, harder-hitting piece, closer to the gritty realism of Prosper Mérimée's original novella, and modern directors have taken often radical steps to return to it.



Handouts for each class and related materials will be posted at:

www.brunyate.com/OpPop/

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