

OPERA AND REAL LIFE

Adams: *Nixon in China* (2011), arrival of Air Force One (Met 2011, Peter Sellars, *director*; James Maddalena, *Nixon*; Russell Braun, *Chou En-Lai*)

Adams: *The Death of Klinghoffer*, Captain and Mamoud (Film 2003, Penny Woolcock, *dir.*; Christopher Maltman, Kamel Boutros)

NYT documentary on the protests surrounding *The Death of Klinghoffer* at its Met premiere in 2012

John **Adams** (1947– , *American composer*), David **Alden** (1949– , *American opera director*), Gilbert **Deflo** (1944– , *Belgian opera director*), Alice **Goodman** (1958– , *American poet and librettist*), Barrie **Kosky** (1967– , *Australian opera director*), Jean-Louis **Martinoty** (1946–2016, *French opera director*), Sir David **McVicar** (1966– , *Scottish opera director*), Claudio **Monteverdi** (1567–1643, *Italian composer*), Wolfgang Amadeus **Mozart** (1756–91, *Austrian composer*), Jean-Pierre **Ponnelle** (1932–88, *French opera director*), Peter **Sellars** (1957– , *American opera director*), Richard **Strauss** (1864–1949, *German composer*)

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<http://www.brunyate.com/TowsonReal/>

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1. WHAT IS REALITY IN OPERA?

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WHAT IS REALITY IN OPERA?

AN EXOTIC AND IRRATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT? Everybody knows Dr Johnson's dismissive definition of opera. Often, alas, the description fits, but need it always be so? This class—and this course—will outline two types of exception.

One, which will occupy the second half of the class, derives from opera's origins as an instrument of power. From the beginning, opera has served as a propaganda vehicle for courtly life and values, and its subjects often include mighty figures from history. True, their stories are usually tweaked to make better entertainment, but what happens when the subjects get close to home?

A more significant kind of reality, however, is when an opera deals with everyday life, sometimes far from court or mythological settings, more often when the combination of music and fine acting gives an insight into the hearts of the characters, not as pasteboard figures but real people. *rb.*

A. GRUNGE INTO ART

Clip from the second scene of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (The Woman Without a Shadow, 1919) by **Richard Strauss** (1864–1949) played first silently and then with music to investigate the difference in effect.

Strauss: *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, scene 2 excerpt (St. Petersburg, 2013; Jonathan Kent, *director*, Valery Gergiev, *conductor*, with Edem Umerov and Olga Sergeeva)

B. SOPRANO INTERLUDES

Two scenes from operas by **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–91) where a soprano aria is preceded by a lengthy orchestral introduction. What does this tell us about the character, and how may it be handled by directors and singers?

Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro*, “Porgi, Amor” (Paris 2004, Annette Dasch; Jean-Louis Martinoty, *director*)

Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro*, “Porgi, Amor,” opening (Glyndebourne 1972; Kiri te Kanawa; Peter Hall, *director*)

Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro*, “Porgi, Amor, opening” (Royal Opera House 2008, Dorothea Röschmann; David McVicar, *director*)

Mozart: *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, introduction to “Martern aller Arten” (Glyndebourne 2015; Sally Matthews & Franck Saurel; David McVicar, *director*)

C. POWER PLAYS

The opening of *Orfeo* (1607) by **Claudio Monteverdi** (1567–1643), the earliest opera regularly performed today, in a production that pays tribute to its court origins, plus three approaches to one of its arias.

Monteverdi: *Orfeo*, opening (Zurich 1978, Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, *dir*)

Monteverdi: *Orfeo*, aria (Barcelona 2002, Gilbert Deflo, *dir*)

Monteverdi: *Orfeo*, aria (Berlin 2014, Barrie Kosky, *dir*)

Monteverdi: *Orfeo*, aria (Munich 1990, David Alden, *dir*)

D. IN OUR OWN LIFETIMES

The American composer **John Adams** (1947–) wrote two operas with librettist **Alice Goodman** (1958–), both dealing with contemporary events and figures, many of whom were still alive. Both achieved great critical success, but a Metropolitan Opera production of the second, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, sparked passionate protests in 2014 by groups infuriated by the opera's empathetic handling of terrorists.