

## The Masterpieces of French Opéra-Comique

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**Start date** 24 June 2016 **End date** 26 June 2016

**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge

**Tutor** Dr Robert Letellier **Course code** 1516NRX066

**Director of Programmes** Emma Jennings

**For further information on this course, please contact** Public Programme Co-ordinator, Clare Kerr  
[clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk) or 01223 746237

**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Robert Ignatius Letellier was educated in Grahamstown, Cambridge, Salzburg, Rome and Jerusalem. He is a member of Trinity College (Cambridge), the Meyerbeer Institute Schloss Thurnau (University of Bayreuth), the Salzburg Centre for Research in the Early English Novel (University of Salzburg), the Maryvale Institute (Birmingham), and a panel tutor of the Institute of Continuing Education (University of Cambridge). He began lecturing at Madingley Hall in 2002, since when he has presented some 23 courses in music, literature and cultural history.

His publications number over 70 items, including books and articles on the late-seventeenth-, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel (particularly the Gothic Novel and Sir Walter Scott), the Bible, and European culture. He has specialized in the Romantic opera, especially the work of Giacomo Meyerbeer (a four-volume English edition of his diaries, critical studies, and two analyses of the operas). He has also written on Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, the Opéra-Comique, Ludwig Minkus and the Romantic Ballet. He has also worked with the BBC, the Royal Opera House and Naxos International, providing presentational material for their productions.

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## Course programme

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### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	Session 1 - A Very French Genre: The 18 <sup>th</sup> century (Rousseau, Monsigny, Philidor, Grétry)
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Session 2 - Revolution and Rescue: A New Era (Gossec, Cherubini, Méhul)
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Session 3 - Providing the Prototype: Scribe and Boieldieu ( <i>La Dame blanche</i> )
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	Session 4 - The Epitome of a Tradition: Scribe and Auber ( <i>Fra Diavolo</i> and <i>Le Domino noir</i> )
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Session 5 - Swashbuckling Charm: Hérold ( <i>Zampa</i> and <i>Le Pré aux clercs</i> )
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Session 6 - Delightful Adventures: Adam and Halevy ( <i>Le Postillon de Longjumeau</i> and <i>L'Éclair</i> )
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Session 7 - The Late Tradition: Barbier & Carré with Meyerbeer and Thomas ( <i>Le Pardon de Ploermel</i> , <i>Mignon</i> )
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

**Aims:**

The aim of the course is to explore the nature of the very French genre of *opéra-comique* - opera, both serious and comic that developed out of the fairground entertainments of the great winter and summer fairs in Paris in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. A counterpart and countersign of grand opera, this more modest type of musical theatre developed its own style, traditions and implications through the great political and social upheavals of the Age of Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism, to become the very epitome of French culture and feeling for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Content:**

Beginning in the popular entertainments of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century summer and winter fairs of Paris, the *opéra-comique* soon developed into a recognizable form of operatic entertainment (a play with music reflecting the lives and hopes of ordinary people). Soon this type of opera acquired its own theatre, and rapidly became a focal point in French culture, and a riposte to the grandeur and tragedy of grand opera. The composers Monsigny (*Le Déserteur*), Philidor (*Tom Jones*) and Grétry (*Richard Coeur de Lion*) provided the first internationally famous examples, using topical themes taken from true stories, novels and folk legends. With the advent of the French Revolution, the genre became famous for its depiction of characters rescued from dire situations at the last moment (Cherubini, *Lodoiska*, *Les Deux Journées*), establishing the type of the rescue opera. During the era of the Napoleonic Wars and the Restoration, the genre became a repository for the values and aspirations ordinary people, the working and middle classes. The operas of the composers Boieldieu (*La Dame Blanche*), Auber (*Fra Diavolo*, *Le Domino noir*), Hérold (*Le Pré aux clercs*), Adam (*Le Postillon de Longjumeau*), Halévy (*L'Eclair*), Meyerbeer (*Le Pardon de Ploermel*) and Thomas (*Mignon*) became classics of French popular culture, and in their elegance, simplicity and melodic charm enduringly capture the every essence of their times.

**Presentation of the course:**

The course will be presented through lectures (with musical and literary illustration), through extended discussion, and with constant reference to recorded and visual media (CD and DVD).

**Outcomes:**

The aim of the course is:

- To deepen knowledge and appreciation of the genre of *opéra-comique*;
- To place this genre within the context of the history of musical theatre;
- To refine knowledge of and reaction to musical conventions and style;
- To place the genre in the context of the history and society of the times;
- To sharpen awareness of the ethos and expectations of the Age of Enlightenment, the *ancien régime*, the Age of Revolution, the Directorate, the Consulate, the First Empire, the Restoration, the Second Empire;
- To encourage engagement with the Romantic Movement, in its revolutionary antecedents, nationalism and bourgeois implications.

**As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:**

- Deepen their knowledge of musical history
- Develop their love of opera in all its genres and guises
- Define a broader critical sense of history, period, society, style and personal articulation
- Attain great fluency of critical reaction and expression in intellectual and cultural history

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

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Author	Title	Publisher and date
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"Opéra comique." <i>The Oxford Dictionary of Music</i> , 2nd ed. rev. Ed. Michael Kennedy. Oxford Music Online. 18 Nov. 2009 <a href="http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e7488">http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e7488</a>		
WILD, Nicole and David CHARLTON. <i>Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique Paris: Répertoire 1762–1972</i> . Sprimont, Pierre Mardaga, 2005.		
CHARLTON, David. <i>Grétry and the growth of opéra-comique</i> Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press 1986		
COOPER, Martin. <i>Opéra Comique</i> . London: Max Parrish & Co. Ltd., 1959.		
DENT, Edward J. <i>Opera</i> . Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1940. Rev. ed., 1949:70-71.		
LETELLIER, Robert Ignatius. <i>Opéra-Comique: A Sourcebook</i> . Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010.		
LETELLIER, Robert Ignatius. <i>Daniel-François-Esprit Auber: The Man and His Music</i> . Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010.2010.		
LETELLIER, Robert Ignatius. <i>An Introduction to the Dramatic Works of Giacomo Meyerbeer</i> . Ashgate, 2008.		
POUGIN, Arthur. <i>Adolphe Adam: sa vie, sa carrière, ses mémoires artistique</i> . Paris: G. Charpentier, 1877. Reprinted Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1973.		
POUGIN, Arthur. <i>Boieldieu</i> . Paris: Charpentier et Cie, 1875.		
POUGIN, Arthur. <i>Hérolde: biographie critique</i> . (Les Musiciens célèbres.) Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1906.		
SADIE, Stanley (ed.) <i>The Grove Dictionary of Opera</i> . 4 vols. London: Macmillan, 1992.		
WARRACK, John and Ewen WEST. <i>The Oxford Dictionary of Opera</i> . OUP, 1992.		

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 15 April 2016