

## The Operatic Phenomenon: A Song of Love and Death

---

**Start date** 13 January 2017

**End date** 15 January 2017

**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge

**Tutor** Dr Robert Letellier

**Course code** 1617NRX057

**Director of Programmes**

Emma Jennings

**For further information on this  
course, please contact**

Public Programme Coordinator, 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

---

### Tutor biography

Robert Ignatius Letellier is a lecturer and author and has presented nearly 30 courses in music, literature and cultural history at ICE since 2002. Educated in Grahamstown, Salzburg, Rome and Jerusalem, he is a member of Trinity College (Cambridge), the Meyerbeer Institute Schloss Thurmau (University of Bayreuth), the Salzburg Centre for Research in the Early English Novel (University of Salzburg) and the Maryvale Institute (Birmingham) as well as a panel tutor at ICE.

Lectures given by Robert include copious audio-visual examples, utilising CD, DVD and PowerPoint. He encourages the exchange of ideas among the participants, with as much interaction and discussion as possible.

Robert's publications number over 100 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), the opera-comique and Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, Operetta, the Romantic Ballet and Ludwig Minkus. He has also worked with the BBC, the Royal Opera House, Naxos International and Marston Records, in the researching and preparation of productions.

---

## Course programme

---

### 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: Orpheus, the archetypal myth (Monteverdi, Purcell, Gluck, Mozart)
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Session 2: The elements and alternate states of mind (Hoffmann, Lortzing, Weber, Donizetti, Bellini)
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Session 3: Passion, race and creed: the ideological urge (Auber, Rossini, Hérold, Halévy, Meyerbeer)
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	Session 4: Love, and the meaning of life and death (Wagner)
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Session 5: Myths of immortality (Berlioz, Gounod, Boito, Janacek)
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

## **Sunday**

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Session 6: Passion as physical and psychic correlative (Bizet, Offenbach, Massenet, Verdi)
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Session 7: Later looks at old stories (Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, Humperdinck, R. Strauss, Berg)
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

---

## Course syllabus

---

### Aims:

- 1) To explore the meaning and logic of opera as an artistic medium.
- 2) To examine traditional vectors of meaning in making sense of life.
- 3) To develop personal capacity for analysis and appreciation of music and literature.

### Content:

Opera has been seen as an extravagance, a delusion, a plaything of the rich and leisured, and yet it continues to exercise a firm hold on the popular imagination throughout the world. The potent combination of words and music exercises a deep appeal, not least because of the extraordinary fusion of the dominant themes of love and death, a combination that haunts the history of opera from its inception in 1597 to the present. The first opera to survive, Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1600) is archetypal in every way. It uses the Ancient Greek myth of Orpheus who, out of love for his dead wife, brooked the terrors of the underworld to bring back to life, using his potent skills as a supreme musician. Ever since, all operas in one way or another reflect the essentials of this myth: the power and beauty of life itself, etched by the ever presence of death, are enhanced and vivified by the power of music. This course uses history, literature, music mythology and genre to explore the potency of opera as almost an alternative religion, which in confronting life love and death, and their mystical intertwining, addresses a deep need or hunger in the human heart. Operas from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present will be used to explore this theme.

### Presentation of the course:

The course will be built around the history of opera, played on CD. There will be constant allusion to the intellectual and cultural background out of which the operas emerged, and discussion of the many thematic and symbolic concerns implicit to the drama and the music, and its reflection of the composers' views of the human condition. A strong visual dimension will be part of this process.

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

- 1) a fuller knowledge of the sweep of operatic history;
- 2) a deeper insight into the nature and style of this musical and dramatic art;
- 3) a greater capacity to examine and analyze the themes and symbols at work in opera;
- 4) an expanded familiarity with the musical and literary elements of music and opera, generally;
- 5) an increased capacity to recognize, explore and identify with individual, philosophical, moral or religious points of view in personal experience.

---

## Reading and resources list

---

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.

---

Author	Title	Publisher and date
CONRAD, Peter.	<i>A Song of Love and Death: The Meaning of Opera.</i>	London: The Hogarth Press, 1987.
SADIE, Stanley (ed.)	<i>The Grove Dictionary of Opera.</i>	London: Macmillan, 1992.
WARRACK, John.	<i>German Opera: From the Beginnings to Wagner</i> (Cambridge Studies in Opera)	Cambridge University Press, 2001

**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:* 04 January 2017