

## Weekend Courses 2024-25

### The three *Bel Canto* masterpieces of Giuseppe Verdi's Middle Period

**Start date:** 24 January 2025                      **End date:** 26 January 2025

**Venue:** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge  
CB23 8AQ

**Tutor:** Dr Robert Letellier                      **Course Code:** 2425NRX018

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#### Tutor biography

Robert Ignatius Letellier is a lecturer and author and has presented some 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-17th-, 18th- and early 19th-century novel (particularly the Gothic Novel and Sir Walter Scott), the Bible, and European culture. He has specialised 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.

## Summary of content

Verdi, the symbol of resurgent Italian nationalism, composed popular operas that have entranced the world with their wonderful melodies. For many, the epitome of Verdi's creativity is the trilogy of masterpieces he wrote in mid-life: *Rigoletto* (1851), *La Traviata* (1853) and *Il Trovatore* (1853). Appropriating the traditions of Italian Romantic *melodramma*, and refining the musical heritage of *bel canto*, these works carry a lyrical tradition to its apogee. The moving stories of violent passion, self-sacrificial love and plangent death, and an overwhelming strength of melody, have secured these works an enduring place in hearts of music lovers through the decades.

## Aims

This course aims to:

- appreciate the evolution of opera in mid-19th century
- explore the concept of redemption and its implications
- deepen awareness of Giuseppe Verdi's contribution to opera

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## Course sessions

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### Friday

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

19:00	Dinner
<b>20:30 – 22:00</b>	<b>The <i>Bel Canto</i> Tradition and <i>melodramma</i> (Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini)</b>
22:00	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b><i>Rigoletto</i> 1 Victor Hugo &amp; Francesco Maria Piave</b>
10:30	Coffee
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b><i>Rigoletto</i> 2 What kind of love?</b>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free time
16:00	Tea
<b>16:30 – 18:00</b>	<b><i>Il Trovatore</i> 1 Antonio Guttierrez, Salvatore Cammarano</b>
18:00 – 18:30	Free time
18:30	Dinner
<b>20:00 – 21:30</b>	<b><i>Il Trovatore</i> 2 Fate, Superstition &amp; Love</b>
21:30	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b><i>La Traviata</i> 1 Alexandre Dumas &amp; Francesco Maria Piave</b>
10:30	Coffee
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b><i>La Traviata</i> 2 Society &amp; Sacrifice</b>
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

### **Presentation of the course**

1. to demonstrate a deeper knowledge and understanding of the nature of opera as a musical form, and its historical unfolding over the 19th century
2. to have fuller idea of the nature of Verdi's output, his characteristics, his affinities with the operatic traditions of Italian Romanticism, with their special recurrent motifs, themes and features
3. to see traditional *melodrama* / *bel canto* and their literary recreations as a dynamic aspect of the operatic scenario, and to have some appreciation of the appropriate skill of the librettist(s)
4. to see how opera and its special themes have been used by Verdi as symbolic and metaphorical commentary on issues pertinent to their contemporary history and society
5. to appreciate the differing ways in which musical genre treats literature and drama as a reflection of changing aesthetic fashions, and itself becomes an agent for change in cultural history.

### **Learning outcomes**

As a result of the course, you will gain a greater understanding of the subject and you should be able to:

- place opera in a wider historical context
- appreciate more of the influence of cultural currents
- grow in the knowledge of the operatic genre
- value the variety and depth of Verdi as a composer of opera

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## Reading and resources list

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**There are no compulsory readings for this course.**

**However, you may find the below recommended reading list of interest to supplement your course.**

*The Grove Dictionary of Opera* (Macmillan 1992)

*The Oxford Dictionary of Opera* (Oxford University Press 1992)

Budden, Julian, *The Operas of Verdi 3 vols* (Oxford University Press 1972, 1992)

Conrad, Peter, *Verdi and/or Wagner. Two Men, Two Worlds, Two Centuries* (Thames and Hudson Ltd 2011)

Osborne, Charles, *The Complete Operas of Verdi* (Victor Gollancz 1969)

Verdi, Giuseppe, *The Operas of Verdi, vocal scores / full scores* (Ricordi / Dover)

Weaver, William, *The Verdi Companion* (Norton 1979)

Walker, Frank, *The Man Verdi* (Littlehampton 1962)

**Note:** Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) students 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 ICE course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*(Information correct as of April 2024)*