

SEX and VIOLINS: Opera's Version of the Battle of the Sexes

Coordinator: James Smith

Opera's often extravagant depictions of the pain of love and desire can be easily caricatured, but one can also be illuminated by examining its dramatic conflicts. We dive into signal examples from the repertoire, and explore how the musical style and production choices help us see these issues in new ways. Especial attention is paid to evolutionary insights into male-female tensions, and how those are reflected in the music and dramaturgy. In the process we gain appreciation for the genius of these composers: Verdi, Wagner, Puccini, Bartok, Bizet and Debussy. See syllabus for selections.

Readings and other Required Materials:

Participants will view selections from the operas on YouTube, and read about background on internet web sites.

James Smith has coordinated a number of music study groups, and is especially interested in music's connection to culture, psychology and evolution.

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- Week 1 The battle of the sexes, and how music can illuminate it.
Bizet's *Carmen*
- Week 2 *Carmen* continued: Female Sexuality and its Discontents
- Week 3 An Independent Woman: Verdi's *La Traviata*
- Week 4 What will the family think? *Traviata* continues
- Week 5 Mr. or Mrs. Right: Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*
- Week 6 How we make mating choices: Bartok continued
- Week 7 A Knight in Shining Armor: Wagner's *Lohengrin*
- Week 8 Keeping secrets from you lover: *Lohengrin* again
- Week 9 Bring her home to mommy? Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*
- Week 10 Butterflying the Coop: Puccini in America
- Week 11 Love's Mystery: Debussy's *Pelléas and Mélisande*
- Week 12 Domestic Violence: Wagner's *Die Walküre*
- Week 13 Happily Ever After: Highlights and Summary