



Operas of Puccini and Strauss (MUSI 6397), Fall 2004

Professor: Andrew Davis ([email <adavis@uh.edu>](mailto:adavis@uh.edu))

[Home page and syllabus](#) | [Daily schedule](#) | [Reserves list](#)

Home page and syllabus

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Course information:

MUSI 6397 (section 12274), Operas of Puccini and Strauss | Monday and Wednesday, 12:00P.M.–1:30P.M. | course web page: <http://www.uh.edu/~adavis5/musi6397> | This is a course on the operatic music of two of the most important composers in the early-twentieth century: Giacomo Puccini in Italy and Richard Strauss in Germany. The course is a blended theory/history seminar (and can satisfy credit for either), but focuses mainly on the music and style of these two composers. The survey of Puccini begins with a study of his three "mature" operas: *La Boheme*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*, then turns to the late style, as exemplified by *Il Trittico* and *Turandot*. The survey of Strauss will focus on both *Salome* and the Hoffmansthal operas, specifically *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, and *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Periodic essay assignments, a final paper on a topic of your choice, and a presentation drawn from work in progress on the paper supplement regular listening and reading assignments.

Prerequisites:

You must have completed an undergraduate music theory and history curriculum (or demonstrated equivalent competency).

Materials:

Scores (all available at the University Bookstore, 126 University Center, 713.748.0923). From Dover Publications (New York): Puccini, *Madama Butterfly*; Strauss, *Salome*; Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*. From Ricordi (Milan) and distributed in the United States by Hal Leonard (New York): Puccini, *Turandot*. You are required to make photocopies of required reading assignments and bring the copies to class. It will also help if you are able to listen to the assigned excerpts with a score, although you are not required to make copies of scores to bring to class.

You will be evaluated on the following:

1. Your participation in the class discussions and the degree to which you demonstrate you have completed the required listening and reading assignments. You **MUST** come to class familiar with the material and ready to discuss it.
2. Periodic essay assignments.
3. One class presentation.
4. One final paper.

Essay assignments:

Essay 1. Listen to the following well-known arias from Puccini's *Tosca*: Tosca's "Vissi

d'arte vissi d'amore" from Act II, and Cavaradossi's "E lucevan le stelle" from Act III. Write an essay of about 3–4 pages in which you comment on how these arias—often thought to be "quintessential Puccini"—are representative of the composer's style. Comment on features of the arias such as melody, orchestration, role of the voice, harmony, voice leading, rhythm and meter, and other parameters we've discussed in class. You should compare the pieces to some we've looked at in class, either from *Boheme* ("O soave fanciulla," or Musetta's waltz for example) or from *Tosca* ("Recondita harmonia," for example), and/or integrate some of what we have read on Puccini and his music into your essay.

Essay 2. Write an essay of about 4 pages in which you compare and contrast Puccini's *Turandot* and Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. In terms of the plot, dramaturgy, presentation of the drama in the music, general musical language, or specific compositional techniques, how are these operas similar and how are they different? Is there any basis for a comparison at all? How do both operas use juxtaposition of distinct theatrical genres and/or musical styles to create a "distance" between the audience and the drama on stage? *Ariadne* clearly uses the stage-within-a-stage device; does *Turandot*? Just how different are these pieces—or just how similar are they? What do these two pieces tell you about the relationship of Strauss and Puccini, both to each other and to their times?

Final paper and presentation:

Final paper.

On the last day of class you are required to turn in a paper of about 15 pages in length. The paper can be either analytical or historical in nature, but in some way it must comment on the music of Strauss and Puccini, their styles, different approaches to understanding their music, or other aspects of the music we've discussed in class. The paper, that is, cannot be exclusively historical, biographical, etc., but must integrate informed critical or analytical commentary on the music, supported with references to the scores and/or musical examples in the text. Beyond this, however, the topic is entirely up to you.

Submit a topic to me by the start of week 6, and do not change it after this. This gives you 6 weeks to prepare before the first class presentations start (see below). **The final paper is due the last day of class: Wednesday 12/01 (NOT later than this).**

Class presentation.

Class meetings in weeks 12, 13, and 14 will be devoted to class presentations in which you will present to the class the work you've been doing for your paper. You should prepare handouts, recordings, score examples, and/or transparencies or other graphic images as necessary to effectively communicate your ideas. I can help you in preparing these materials if necessary. The presentation serves 2 purposes: 1) it allows you to get feedback on the work you've been doing (and it makes you have it prepared earlier than you otherwise would), and 2) it increases the number of operas, topics, and concepts about Puccini and Strauss that the class gets to hear and that you get to study.

On scheduling presentations: I'll give you the option to sign up for one of the slots in the first week (week 12); after that I'll assign presentation dates based on a random lottery. I'd like to have 2 presentations per class period, so you should think of your presentation in terms of a half hour time slot, allowing time for me and your classmates to ask questions about your work.

Grading:

Your grade will be computed as follows: class participation, 20% | 2 essays, 15% each | class presentation, 20% | final paper, 30%.

The final grade is assigned according to the standard scale of percentages: A: 92.5–100 | A-: 90.0–92.5 | B+: 87.5–90.0 | B: 82.5–87.5 | B-: 80.0–82.5 | C+: 77.5–80.0 | C: 72.5–77.5 | C-: 70.0–72.5 | D+: 67.5–70.0 | D: 62.5–67.5 | D-: 60.0–62.5 | F: below 60.0

Academic dishonesty:

You are expected to do your own work on all assignments and exams unless instructed differently; any work you hand in at any time should be your own. Problems with academic dishonesty will be handled according to the procedures outlined in the student handbook (see <http://www.uh.edu/dos/hdbk/acad/achonpol.html>). Please note that the mere suspicion of academic dishonesty is enough to initiate official action; please do not put yourself in the position of having to deal with this kind of situation.

Disabilities:

If you have a disability that affects your capacity to complete assignments and exams in a timely manner, please inform me at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made. You will need to document your disability with the UH Center for Students with Disabilities (see <http://www.uh.edu/csd/>). The CSD will provide me with information on your disability, and you and I will work out a mutually agreeable arrangement (based on recommendations provided by the CSD) for how to accommodate the disability.

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