



## Opera in Vienna

Dvořák, Strauss, Verdi & Wagner

2-7 April 2024 (MK 218)

6 days • £3,660

Lecturer: Dr John Allison

Four operas – *Parsifal* (Wagner), *Rusalka* (Dvořák), *Die Fledermaus* (Strauss) and *Simon Boccanegra* (Verdi).

Productions of the highest quality in both the Staatsoper and Volksoper.

Based at a comfortable, traditional five-star hotel perfectly located beside the Staatsoper.

Not content with being the most important city in the history of western music, Vienna continues to nurture an exceptionally active cultural life of a high level of excellence. Music and opera are cherished by government and citizens in happy concord perhaps more than anywhere else in the world.

The venerable Staatsoper hosts three productions, Wagner's *Parsifal*, Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* and Dvořák's *Rusalka*. The reputation that Vienna used to have for being wedded to tradition is fading, and productions here are now more likely to reflect international currents in stage direction. As ever, stagecraft, stage design and dramatic portrayal are of the highest order, and the house continues to attract the world's finest singers and conductors. And of course it enjoys the supreme skills and sumptuous sound of the Vienna Philharmonic, the orchestra in residence. Highly sophisticated audiences and critics give no quarter to complacency or laziness; opera at the Staatsoper is a fairly safe bet.

Though it now stages a wide repertoire, the Volksoper remains the spiritual home of operetta, and there could be no better place to enjoy one of the peaks of the repertoire, *Die Fledermaus*.

Dvořák drew inspiration from Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* for his opera *Rusalka*, which premiered in 1901, and explores pressing questions of the era through a Freudian lens, delving into cultural unease. Civilisation and nature, fears and desires, power dynamics and gender roles clash in an intensely charged manner. Director Sven-Eric Bechtolf presents these emotional and mental states in a surreal and oppressive world, set in a snowy desert landscape.

Director Kirill Serebrennikov, who is also responsible for set and costume design, presents a unique interpretation of *Parsifal*.



Lithograph 1902.

The story is told through flashbacks by the older Parsifal, guiding us through the events of the first two acts before returning to the present in Act 3. Serebrennikov connects the troubled world of the Grail Society with a prison complex, emphasising the struggles faced by marginalised individuals.

Despite criticism when first performed, *Simon Boccanegra* is now regarded by opera lovers as a hidden gem. It is perhaps Verdi's most personal work, certainly his darkest and most pessimistic. Verdi himself said of the opera 'The subject... is sad because it has to be sad, but it's gripping.'

All will be introduced during the daily session of talks and discussions. There are also guided tours on foot to a choice selection of Vienna's art, architecture and musical heritage, as well as plenty of free time for rest, recuperation and preparation for the next performance.

### Itinerary

**Day 1.** Fly at c. 3.00pm from London Heathrow to Vienna (Austrian Airlines). Arrive at the hotel in time to settle in before dinner.

**Day 2.** A talk on the music is followed by a visit to the Hofburg, the sprawling Habsburg palace where we see *inter alia* the splendid library hall and the Imperial apartments. Free afternoon. Evening opera at the Staatsoper: *Parsifal* (Wagner), Alexander Soddy (conductor), Kirill Serebrennikov (staging, costumes), Michael Nagy (Amfortas), Günther Groissböck (Gurnemanz), Wolfgang Bankl (*Parsifal*), Daniel Frank (Klingsor), Werner Van Mechelen (*Kundry*), Wolfgang Bankl (*Titirel*), Nikolay Sidorenko (*Parsifal* then).

**Day 3.** The daily talk precedes a visit to the Kunsthistorisches Museum, one of the world's greatest art galleries. Free time in the

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continued

afternoon. Evening opera at the Staatsoper: *Rusalka* (Antonín Dvořák), Tomáš Hanus (conductor), Sven-Eric Bechtolf (production), Pavel Cernoch (the prince), Eliška Weissová (the foreign princess), Adam Palka (the merman), Corinne Winters (Rusalka), Okka von der Damerau (Jezibaba).

**Day 4.** A morning walk through the centre of the inner city includes the Stephansdom, the great Gothic cathedral. After lunch there is free time followed by an evening operetta at the Volksoper: *Die Fledermaus* (Strauß), Alexander Joel (conductor), Karl-Michael Ebner (Gabriel von Eisenstein), Ulrike Steinsky (Rosalinde), Lauren Urquhart (Adele), Julia Edtmeier (Ida), Szymon Komasa (Dr. Falke), Katia Ledoux (Prince Orlofsky), David Kerber (Alfred), Daniel Ohlenschläger (Frank), Sigrid Hauser (Frosch), Stanislaw Napierala (Dr. Blind), Gabor Oberegger (Ivan).

**Day 5.** A visit to the excellent Museum of Applied Arts, especially rewarding for Secessionist (Art Nouveau) furniture and design. Free afternoon followed by a final evening opera at the Staatsoper: *Simon Boccanegra* (Verdi), Marco Armiliato (conductor), Peter Stein (production), Luca Salsi (Simon Boccanegra), Kwangchul Youn (Fiesco), Clemens Unterreiner (Paolo), Freddie De Tommaso (Gabriele Adorno), Federica Lombardi (Amelia).

**Day 6.** Journey to the airport. The flight to Heathrow arrives at c. 2.15pm.

## Lecturer

**Dr John Allison.** Editor of *Opera* magazine and music critic. He was born in South Africa and completed his PhD degree while playing the piano and working as assistant organist at Cape Town cathedral. Since moving to London in 1989 he has written for publications around the world, authored two books and served on the juries of many international competitions. He co-founded the International Opera Awards in 2013. He reviews for the *Daily Telegraph* and has previously held positions as music critic on *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Times*.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person.** Two sharing: £3,660 or £3,450 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,190 or £3,980 without flights.

**Included:** flights (economy class) with Austrian

Airlines (Airbus 320); travel by private coach for airport transfers; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local guides where required.

**Accommodation. Hotel Bristol, Vienna** (bristolvienna.com): 5-star hotel in a superb location on the Ringstrasse near the Staatsoper opera house, traditionally furnished and decorated. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

**Music:** tickets (first category) to 4 performances are included, costing c. £700. Tickets have been requested and will be confirmed in the autumn.

**How strenuous?** This tour involves a lot of walking in the town centre, and should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Public transport (metro or tram), is used on some occasions.

Average distance by coach per day: 6 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.