



Welsh National Opera

Così fan tutte, Death in Venice

8–10 March 2024 (MK 192)

3 days • £1,040

(Including tickets to 2 performances)

Lecturer: Simon Rees

The Welsh National Opera in its home theatre, the acoustically and architecturally excellent Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff.

Excursions and talks with Simon Rees, writer, lecturer and former dramaturg of WNO.

Stay at a 5-star hotel 15 minutes walk from the opera house, and see some of the highlights of Cardiff's arts and heritage.

In its programming and productions WNO strives to combine adventurousness with accessibility, and commitment to developing new audiences with musical and dramatic integrity. The company punches far above its weight and has created one of the most admired centres of operatic excellence in Europe.

In 2004 WNO moved into their current home, the Wales Millennium Centre. The architectural brief was to build something 'unmistakably Welsh and internationally outstanding.' The winning firm, Percy Thomas, came up with a monumental yet accessible structure of slate, glass, steel and timber built to withstand the lashings of the elements on its coastal location.

Mozart's comic opera, *Così fan tutte*, to a sardonic libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte has always been as disquieting as it is entertaining, as full of manipulations and scheming as it is of beautiful melodies and witty ensembles. Max Hoehn's production, sung in his own English translation, sets the opera in a 1970s school, with the four young lovers as schoolchildren, Don Alfonso as an experiment-loving schoolmaster, and Despina as – well, she can only be the dinner-lady. During the switcheroo between Fiordiligi, Dorabella, Ferrando and Guglielmo, the voices settle in pairs of soprano-tenor and mezzo-baritone, only to come back at the end to the unstable matchings of high and low voices which is where the story started.

Benjamin Britten was inspired by Thomas Mann's novella to set the novella *Death in Venice* as an opera starring his partner Peter Pears as Gustav Aschenbach, a writer who seeks solace in Venice, but arrives during an outbreak of cholera. Aschenbach becomes besotted by the beauty of a young Polish boy, Tadzio, and follows him to the beach and around the hotel



Wales Millennium Centre

on the Venice Lido, until himself succumbing both to the temptations of the hotel barber to try a bit of hair-dye and makeup to remove the signs of age, and to the cholera which eventually strikes him down. Tadzio's role is written for a dancer, and there is a great deal of ballet in this opera, here staged by Olivia Fuchs.

Itinerary

Day 1. The tour begins at 4.00pm with a lecture and pre-opera dinner at the hotel. It is a short walk across the Cardiff Bay development to the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC) for the opera: *Così fan tutte* (Mozart).

Day 2. After a morning lecture take the boat from Cardiff Bay to the National Museum of Wales which has one of the finest collections of Impressionist paintings in the UK. Return to the WMC for the afternoon opera: *Death in Venice* (Britten). Dinner in the hotel.

Day 3. Cardiff Castle – a medieval keep, a Victorian recreation of the perimeter wall of the Roman Fort and a residence with wonderful Gothic Revival interiors created by Burgess for the Marquess of Bute. The tour finishes at Cardiff Central Station by 2.30pm and at the hotel shortly after.

Lecturer

Simon Rees. A freelance dramaturg, Simon translates opera librettos for singing and surtitles and lectures and writes on opera, theatre, art and architecture. He is an Associate Lecturer at the Wales International Academy of Voice, and also teaches at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama. A novelist, poet and librettist, he was dramaturg at Welsh National Opera from 1989 to 2012.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £1,040.

Single occupancy: £1,250.

Included: top category tickets for two performances; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; two dinners with wine, water, coffee; travel by private coach and river boat; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Voco St David's Hotel & Spa, Cardiff (stdavids.vocohotels.com). This is a striking building on the waterfront at Cardiff Bay, 15 minutes on foot from the opera house. The AA gives it a 5-star rating, rooms are pleasingly contemporary in design. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of walking on this tour. A good level of fitness is necessary.

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continued

It should not be attempted by anyone who has
difficulty with everyday walking and
stair-climbing.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.