



Welsh National Opera

Madame Butterfly, Don Giovanni

16–18 March 2022 (M1 283)

3 days • £840

(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.

Madama Butterfly is Puccini's great opera about the Nagasaki geisha, Cio-Cio-San, and her love for the American sailor Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton. It is based on a true story from the 1890s, converted into an operatic tragedy by splicing on an ending that resembles Virgil's story of the death of Dido. Lindy Hume's production largely de-Japanises the opera, setting it in the near future in an unspecified location. Its ingenious revolving set shows *Butterfly*'s house from all angles, displaying all the settings of her tragic life.

John Caird's production of Mozart's masterpiece *Don Giovanni* uses Rodin's sculptures as a visual reference to set the dark and haunted scene. The Commendatore's monumental statue resembles Rodin's famous *Balzac*, while sculpted figures writhe in the scenery like damned souls from Rodin's *The Gates of Hell*. Mozart's music is witty, even frivolous, then plunges into depths of remorse, lamentation and horror, reflecting Lorenzo da Ponte's wonderful libretto.



Cardiff, National Museum of Wales, after a drawing 1927 by Joseph Pike.

Itinerary

Day 1. The tour begins at 3.30pm with a short walk from the hotel across the Cardiff Bay development to the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC) for a lecture, pre-opera dinner and opera: *Madame Butterfly* (Puccini).

Day 2. 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 a lecture, pre-opera dinner and opera: *Don Giovanni* (Mozart).

Day 3. A guided tour of the Wales Millennium Centre is followed by 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: £840.
Single occupancy: £970

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

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.