



## Opera & Ballet in Paris

Liszt, Mozart, Puccini, Strauss

**31 October–5 November 2022**

**(MI 564)**

6 days • £3,430

(including tickets to 4 performances)

Lecturer: Dr Michael Downes

Karita Mattila appears in a new production of Richard Strauss's spectacular *Salome*.

*Mayerling*, Kenneth MacMillan's choreographic masterpiece, at the Palais Garnier

Productions by world-renowned directors Robert Carsen (*The Magic Flute*) and Pierre Audi (*Tosca*)

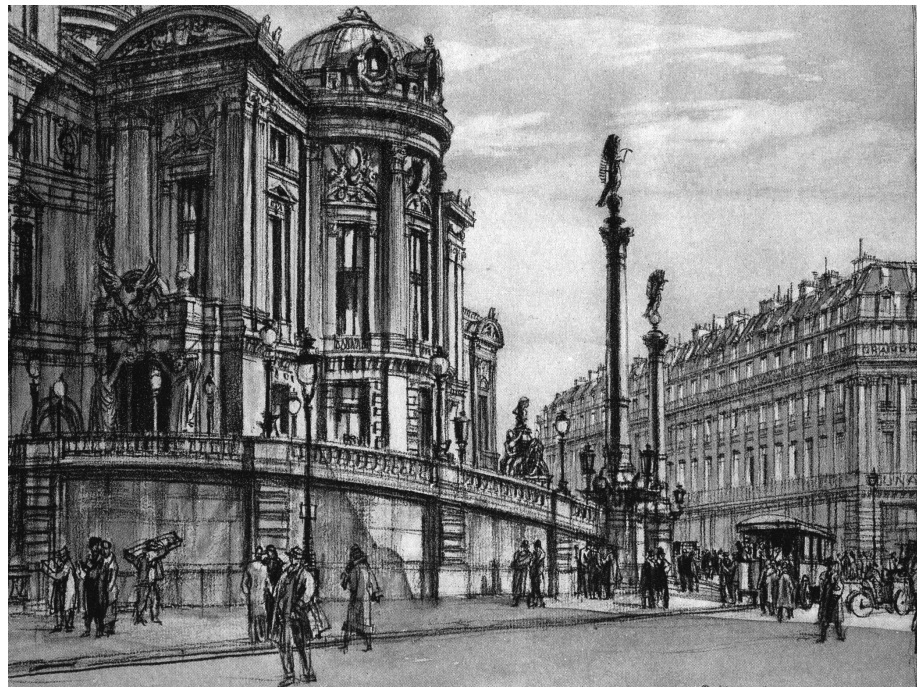
Backstage visits offer behind-the-scenes insights into Paris' two magnificent opera houses, the Palais Garnier and Opéra Bastille.

Explore the Egyptian connections in *The Magic Flute* with a visit to the Louvre, plus visits to the Cité de la Musique and the Musée Jacquemart-André.

Music and Paris are intricately intertwined: opera and ballet are central to the city's social and cultural life, and Paris in turn has shaped both art-forms to an extent few other places can rival. It boasts not one but two of the world's greatest opera houses: the sumptuous Opéra Garnier, completed in 1875, and the monumental Opéra Bastille, opened in 1989 for the bicentenary of the French Revolution.

For much of the Opéra's 350-year existence, achieving success in Paris has been a crucial career goal, attracting musicians here from across the world. The Hungarian-born Franz Liszt moved to Paris at the age of eleven and maintained a lifelong connection with the city. His virtuosic music provides the exhilarating score for Kenneth MacMillan's *Mayerling*, premiered at Covent Garden in 1978 and regarded by ballet companies worldwide as one of the most formidable challenges in the repertoire. It tells the story of the 1889 suicide pact between the Archduke Rudolph, heir to the throne of the Habsburg Empire, and his teenaged lover Mary Vetsera. The Palais Garnier provides an appropriately *fin-de-siècle* setting for MacMillan's inspired recreation of this catastrophic incident.

The *fin-de-siècle* theme continues with our first two operas: both were based on plays written in the decade following Rudolph and Mary's deaths, and premiered in theatres only a mile or so from the Palais Garnier – an



*The Palais Garnier, by Henry Rushbury from 'Paris' by Sidney Dark.*

indication of the extraordinary intensity of Paris's theatrical as well as musical life.

Uniquely among Oscar Wilde's works, *Salome* was written in French; the author's fascination with the titular character – a shadowy, unnamed figure in the New Testament source – was shared by French writers and artists including Flaubert, Moreau, Huysmans, Laforgue and Mallarmé, whose portrayals all left their imprint on Wilde's scandalous play. By the time *Salome* was premiered Wilde was in Reading Gaol, but its fame quickly spread to Germany, where it immediately inspired Richard Strauss to create his most sensational opera. We see *Salome* in a new production by American director Lydia Steier, making her debut at the Opéra Bastille; the title role is taken by French/South African soprano Elza van den Heever, while Finnish superstar Karita Mattila plays Herodias for the first time.

*Tosca's* journey from the spoken to the operatic stage was similarly swift: Victorien Sardou's *La Tosca* was premiered at the Théâtre de la Porte-Martin in 1887, with Sarah Bernhardt in the title role; the 1900 premiere of Puccini's opera in Rome was an event of national significance, with attendees including Italy's Prime Minister and Queen. Pierre Audi's

much-acclaimed production draws out the religious themes of the work, crystallised in the memorable finale to Act I where the chorus sings the *Te Deum* as Scarpia reveals his evil intentions towards the singer Tosca and her lover Cavaradossi. Scarpia is played by British/Canadian baritone Gerald Finley, while the fast-rising Russian soprano Elena Stikhina takes on the title role.

*The Magic Flute* has no particular connections with the *fin-de-siècle* – nor with Paris, beyond the three visits made here by the composer early in his career – but is one of the best-loved of all operas. Such are the philosophical and emotional resonances of its mysterious story that it offers inexhaustible inspiration to producers. Robert Carsen is fascinated by the piece's construction from a series of opposites – 'day and night, love and hate, man and woman' – and draws on Mozart's own words about life and death to create a production of moving simplicity. Bavarian soprano Christiane Karg makes her house debut in the role of Pamina.

Opera & Ballet in Paris  
continued

## Itinerary

**Day 1.** Travel by Eurostar at c. 10.30am from London St Pancras to Paris. Afternoon visit of the Opéra Bastille.

**Day 2.** A morning lecture precedes a guided tour of the sumptuous Palais Garnier opera house. Return to the Garnier after lunch for a matinée performance of *Mayerling* (Franz Liszt), Kenneth MacMillan (choreographer), Martin Yates (conductor).

**Day 3.** Morning lecture, then visit the Jacquemart-André museum, a lavish residence built in 1875 for the banker Edouard André which houses the collection he made with his wife, Nélie Jacquemart, a painter. It contains a fine collection of 18th-cent. paintings: Dutch, Flemish and Italian masters. Free afternoon. Evening at the Opéra Bastille: *Salome* (Richard Strauss), Lydia Steier (director), Simone Young (conductor), *Elza van den Heever* (Salome), Zoran Todorovich (Herodes), Karita Mattila (Herodias), Iain Paterson (Jochanaan), Tansel Akzeybek (Narraboth).

**Day 4.** Morning lecture, then drive to Porte de la Villette to visit the Cité de la Musique and the music museum. Lunch is followed by some free time. Evening at the Opéra Bastille: *Tosca* (Puccini), Pierre Audi (director), Paolo Bortolameo (conductor), Elena Stikhina (Tosca), Brian Jagde (Mario Cavaradossi), Gerald Finley (Scarpia), Sava Vemić (Cesare Angelotti), Michael Colvin (Spoletta).

**Day 5.** After a morning lecture, visit the Louvre to explore the connections to this evening's opera in the Egyptian collection. Free time to explore the rest of the museum. Evening opera at the Bastille: *The Magic Flute* (Mozart), Robert Carsen (director), Antonello Manacorda (conductor), Pavel Petrov (Tamino), Christiane Karg (Pamina), Brindley Sherratt (Sarastro), Caroline Wettergreen (Queen of the Night), Iurii Samoilov (Papageno), Tamara Bounazou (Papagena), Michael Colvin (Monostatos).

**Day 6.** The morning is free before the Eurostar to St Pancras, arriving at c. 4.45pm.

## Lecturer

**Dr Michael Downes.** Director of Music at the University of St Andrews, musical director of St Andrews Chorus, Scotland's largest choral society, and founding artistic director of Byre Opera, which mounts fully staged productions each summer around Scotland and Northern England. He writes programme notes for Wigmore Hall and Aldeburgh Music and reviews music books for the Times Literary Supplement, and his publications include a highly praised study of contemporary British composer Jonathan Harvey.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £3,430 or £3,260 without Eurostar. **Single occupancy:** £4,040 or £3,870 without Eurostar.

Included: return rail travel (Standard Premier) by Eurostar from London to Paris; private coach for transfers; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 3 dinners and 1 lunch with water, wine, coffee; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

**Music:** tickets for 4 performances (*Optima* (top) category) are included costing c. £570.

**Accommodation. Hotel Villa Beaumarchais** (villa-beaumarchais.com): a 4-star hotel, located on a quiet street, a short walk away from the Opéra Bastille and Marais district. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

**How strenuous?** We walk to and from three of the operas, 20 minutes on foot from the hotel. Visits require a fair amount of walking and standing around. There are some late nights but starts are leisurely. You need to be able to lift your luggage on and off the train.

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