

Spring 2023

Mu 150. Special Topics in Music: The End of Opera?

If opera is thought of at all in contemporary culture, it is as a predominantly musical genre that is in decline, of interest only to those “elite” connoisseurs of “classical” music. For much of Western music history, however, the opposite was true. Since its origins in seventeenth-century Italy, opera has been conceived of as a multimedia art form in which spoken theater was enhanced by sounds and sights, resulting in extravagant spectacles that drew mass audiences. By watching and listening to select operatic works in their entirety, this discussion-based seminar will consider the historical and cultural forces that have shifted the genre from the center to the periphery of musical culture, as well as the ways in which certain operatic practices remain surprisingly resilient. Previous coursework in music history is not required; a basic knowledge of Western music notation is highly recommended.