



## Opera in Paris

Tchaikovsky, Bizet, Verdi, Adams

**23–28 February 2026 (MM 873)**

6 days • £4,110

(including tickets to 4 operas)

Lecturer: Dr Michael Downes OBE

Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* at the Palais Garnier is the opera-directing debut of renowned actor Ralph Fiennes.

American stars Thomas Hampson and Renée Fleming lead the cast of Valentina Carrasco's acclaimed production of John Adams' *Nixon in China*.

Nineteenth-century masterpieces by Verdi and Bizet at the Opéra Bastille, with Stéphanie d'Oustrac in the title role of *Carmen*.

Guided visits of the magnificent Palais Garnier opera house and the Opéra-Comique, where *Carmen* premiered in 1875.

Opera and Paris are intricately intertwined: opera and ballet are central to the city's social and cultural life, and Paris in turn has shaped the art-form to an extent few other places can rival. The city 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. This tour features performances at both these iconic theatres, and the chance to witness some of the world's greatest singers interpreting some of opera's most intriguing stories, both personal and public.

We begin our musical programme with two of the most searing stories of frustrated love ever set to music. Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* and Bizet's *Carmen* are perhaps the most popular operas ever produced in Russia and France respectively: premiered within four years of each other, each sets a literary text well known and much loved by its first audiences.

*Eugene Onegin* is a fascinating choice of work for the opera-directing debut of Ralph Fiennes. The world-renowned actor's long-standing interest in Russian literature and culture was deepened by working on *The White Crow*, the 2018 film about the life of Rudolf Nureyev which he directed from David Hare's screenplay. Fiennes learnt Russian in order to play the role of a different Alexander Pushkin, the Kirov ballet master. His new production of *Eugene Onegin* at the Garnier, with a cast most of whom have studied or worked in Russia,



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

promises to draw out the intimacy and beauty of Tchaikovsky's text-setting.

Only two months after the opening in January 1875 of the house that quickly became known as the Palais Garnier, *Carmen* was premiered in the Salle Favart, then as now the home of Paris's Opéra-Comique. Our tour includes a visit of the theatre, which still stands in the Place Boieldieu, less than half a mile from both the Garnier and our hotel. The spectacular title role of *Carmen* will be taken at the Bastille production by Stéphanie d'Oustrac, a favourite at Glyndebourne as well as in Paris for her interpretations of French opera.

We remain at the Bastille for our final two performances, for which the focus shifts from the personal to the public. Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* and John Adams' *Nixon in China* both feature stories of intrigue among the politicians of the United States of America and their families. Verdi's opera recounts the love affair between Riccardo, the Governor of Boston, and Amelia, the wife of his best friend, who takes his revenge by killing him. Verdi originally intended to depict the assassination of Sweden's King Gustav III at a masked ball in Stockholm's Royal Opera House, but was foiled by the Roman censors before the 1859

premiere could take place. The director of the Paris production, Gilbert Deflo, retains the American setting but shifts it to the time of Abraham Lincoln to sharpen the political subtext.

Adams composed *Nixon in China* to a highly praised libretto by Alice Goodman, an American poet who now works as an Anglican priest in Cambridgeshire. Since its premiere at Houston in 1987 it has become perhaps the most popular and widely performed of recent operas. It tells the story of President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to Mao Zedong, chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, and the remarkable rapprochement in Cold War relationships that resulted. Valentina Carrasco's Bastille production was first seen in 2023 and has been widely praised for its poetic and imaginative response to Adams' pulsating score. The roles of Richard Nixon and his wife Pat are taken in the performance we see by two of America's best-loved opera singers, baritone Thomas Hampson and soprano Renée Fleming.

### Itinerary

**Day 1.** Travel by Eurostar at c. 10.30am from London St Pancras to Paris. Time to settle in to the hotel before dinner.

## Opera in Paris continued

**Day 2.** Morning visit to the sumptuous Palais Garnier opera house. Free afternoon before a lecture, dinner and evening performance at the Palais Garnier: **Eugene Onegin** (Tchaikovsky), *Case Scaglione* (conductor), Ralph Fiennes (director), Boris Pinkhasovich (*Eugene Onegin*), Ruzan Mantashyan (*Tatiana*), Bogdan Volkov (*Lensky*), Marvic Monreal (*Olga*), Dmitry Belosselskiy (*Prince Gremin*), Susan Graham (*Madame Larina*), Elena Zaremba (*Filipyevna*), Peter Bronder (*Monsieur Triquet*), Amin Ahangaran (*Zaretsky*), Mikhail Silantev (*Captain*).

**Day 3.** Morning tour of the Opéra-Comique, the theatre where Bizet's *Carmen* premiered in 1875. An afternoon lecture and dinner precedes the evening performance at the Opéra Bastille: **Carmen** (Bizet), Keri-Lynn Wilson (conductor), Calixto Bieito (director), Stéphanie d'Oustrac (*Carmen*), Russell Thomas (*Don José*), Amina Edris (*Micaëla*), Erwin Schrott (*Escamillo*), Nicholas Jones (*Le Dancaïre*), Loïc Félix (*Le Remendado*), Florent Mbia (*Moralès*), Vartan Gabrielian (*Zuniga*), Margarita Polonskaya (*Frasquita*), Seray Pinar (*Mercédès*).

**Day 4.** Morning lecture, then visit one of Paris's museums and galleries. The schedule of visits for today and tomorrow will be confirmed towards the end of 2025. Lunch is included today. Evening at the Opéra Bastille: **Un Ballo in Maschera** (Verdi), Speranza Scappucci (conductor), Gilbert Deflo (director), Matthew Polenzani (*Riccardo*), Angela Meade (*Amelia*), Ariunbaatar Ganbaatar (*Renato*), Sara Blanch (*Oscar*), Elizabeth DeShong (*Ulrica*), Christian Rodrigue Mounougoungou (*Samuele*), Blake Denson (*Tomaso*), Andres Cascante (*Silvano*), Se-Jin Hwang (*Amelia's servant*).

**Day 5.** Morning lecture and visit in Paris (to be confirmed). Some free time in the afternoon before our final dinner and concert at the Opéra Bastille: **Nixon in China** (Adams), Kent Nagano (conductor), Valentina Carrasco (director), Thomas Hampson (*Richard Nixon*), Renée Fleming (*Pat Nixon*), John Matthew Myers (*Mao Zedong*), Caroline Wettergreen (*Chiang Ch'ing*), Joshua Bloom (*Henry Kissinger*), Xiaomeng Zhang (*Zhou Enlai*), Aebh Kelly (*Nancy Tang*), Ning Lang (*second secretary to Mao*).

**Day 6.** Take an early afternoon Eurostar to St Pancras, arriving at c. 2.30pm.

## Lecturer

**Dr Michael Downes OBE.** 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. He has lectured for most of the UK's leading opera companies and writes programme notes for Wigmore Hall and Aldeburgh Music. Publications include books written with and about contemporary British composer Jonathan Harvey, and a collaboration with Nike Wagner, great-granddaughter of Richard. *Story of the Century*, his new book introducing Wagner's *Ring*, will be published by Faber and Faber in November 2024; his next project will be a biography of Elgar for Oxford University Press.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person.** Two sharing: £4,110 or £3,940 without Eurostar. **Single occupancy:** £4,710 or £4,540 without Eurostar.

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

**Music:** tickets for 4 performances (all top category) are included costing c. £660.

**Accommodation.** Hotel Édouard 7 (hoteledouard7-paris.com): comfortable 4-star hotel, located on the Avenue de l'Opéra, a short walk from the Palais Garnier. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

**How strenuous?** Visits require a fair amount of walking and standing around. There are some late nights. You need to be able to lift your luggage on and off the train.

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