



Opera in Vienna

Gassmann, Mozart, Donizetti, Puccini

10–15 March 2026 (MM 900)

6 days • £3,890

Lecturer: Dr John Allison

Four operas – *L'opera seria* (Gassmann), *The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart), *Don Pasquale* (Donizetti) and *Madame Butterfly* (Puccini).

Productions of the highest quality at the Staatsoper, Volksoper and Musiktheater an der Wien.

Heritage hotel conveniently located near the Staatsoper.

Not content with being the most important city in the history of western music, Vienna continues to nurture an exceptionally active cultural life of a high level of excellence. Music and opera are cherished by government and citizens in happy concord perhaps more than anywhere else in the world.

In common with many great cities, Vienna boasts three major opera houses, and our tour takes in all of them. The Staatsoper, Musiktheater an der Wien and Volksoper all have their own distinctive aesthetics and these days are all under dynamic leaderships – witness their vibrant programming.

The first two of the operas we'll take in on this tour were both premiered in Vienna, both indeed at another famous venue: the Burgtheater, these days the city's leading drama stage and, in effect, Austria's national theatre. Leopold Gassmann's comedy *L'opera seria* pokes fun at the operatic conventions of the day (1769), its libretto by Ranieri de' Calzabigi parodying his celebrated senior, Pietro Metastasio. As a 'meta-opera', it anticipates such well-loved works as Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* by a century and a half. It will be staged at the Theater an der Wien, which occupies a special place in Viennese music history and is the site of many operatic premieres, from Salieri's last opera onwards. Beethoven lived in rooms at the theatre for a period and many of his works were first heard there, including the first version of his great opera *Fidelio*. Subsequent premieres there included Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* and *The Gypsy Baron*, and Lehár's *The Merry Widow*.

Gassmann's premiere coincided with the emergence of Mozart, who in 1786 took Vienna by storm with his incomparable *Le nozze di Figaro*, the first of his three collaborations with the librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte. We'll see it at



Lithograph 1902.

the Volksoper — the 'people's opera', located a little way out from Vienna's grand centre but nevertheless an integral part of the city's operatic life — in a recent new production by that theatre's artistic director, Lotte de Beer.

Two popular Italian operas take us to the Staatsoper, one of the high temples of international opera. *Don Pasquale* was Donizetti's last operatic comedy, a 'dramma buffo' premiered on Paris in 1843 with a cast including four of the most celebrated singers of the day. It remains one of the most popular Italian comic operas and was an immediate success — unlike the now well-loved *Madama Butterfly*, which flopped at its La Scala premiere in 1904 but after Puccini's revisions quickly worked its way into audiences' affections.

All will be introduced during the daily session of talks and discussions. There are also guided tours on foot to a choice selection of Vienna's art, architecture and musical heritage, as well as plenty of free time for rest, recuperation and preparation for the next performance.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 12.45pm from London Heathrow to Vienna (British Airways). Arrive at the hotel in time to settle in before dinner.

Day 2. A talk on the music is followed by a visit to the Hofburg, the sprawling Habsburg palace where we see *inter alia* the splendid library hall and the Imperial apartments. Free afternoon. Evening opera at the Musiktheater an der Wien: *L'Opera seria* (Gassmann), Christophe Rousset (conductor), Pietro Spagnoli (Fallito), Roberto de Candia (Delirio), Petr Nekoranec (Sospiro), Josh Lovell (Ritornello), Julie Fuchs (Stonatrilla), Andrea Carroll (Smorfiosa), Serena Gamberoni (Porporina), Alessio Arduini (Passagallo), Alberto Allegrezza (Bragherona), Nicholas Tamagna (Befana), Filippo Mineccia (Caverna).

Day 3. The daily talk precedes a visit to the Kunsthistorisches Museum, one of the world's greatest art galleries. Free time in the afternoon. Evening opera at the Volksoper:

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continued

The Marriage of Figaro (Mozart), Lotte de Beer (director), Omer Meir Wellber (conductor), Daniel Schmutzhard (Count Almaviva), Matilda Sterby (Countess Almaviva), Lauren Urquhart (Susanna), Michael Arivony (Figaro), Annelie Sophie Müller (Cherubino), Ursula Pfitzner (Marcellina), Stefan Cerny (Bartolo), Timothy Fallon (Basilio/Don Curzio), Daniel Ohlenschläger (Antonio), Mira Alkhovik (Barbarina).

Day 4. A morning walk through the centre of the inner city includes the Stephansdom, the great Gothic cathedral. After lunch there is free time followed by an evening opera at the Staatsoper: *Don Pasquale* (Donizetti), Francesco Ivan Ciampa (conductor), Irina Brook (production), Nicola Alaimo (Don Pasquale), Dmitry Korchak (Ernesto), Stefan Astakhov (Malatesta), Pretty Yende (Norina).

Day 5. A visit to the excellent Museum of Applied Arts, especially rewarding for Secessionist (Art Nouveau) furniture and design. Free afternoon followed by a final evening opera at the Staatsoper: *Madame Butterfly* (Puccini), Marco Armiliato (conductor), Anthony Minghella (director), Ermonela Jaho (Cio-Cio-San), Stephanie Maitland (Suzuki), Pinkerton (Saimir Pirgu), Attila Mokus (Sharpless).

Day 6. The flight from Vienna to London Heathrow arrives at c. 12.45pm.

Lecturer

Dr John Allison. Editor of *Opera* magazine and music critic. He was born in South Africa and completed his PhD degree while playing the piano and working as assistant organist at Cape Town cathedral. Since moving to London in 1989 he has written for publications around the world, authored two books and served on the juries of many international competitions. He co-founded the International Opera Awards in 2013. He reviews for the *Daily Telegraph* and has previously held positions as music critic on *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Times*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,890 or £3,710 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,420 or £4,240 without flights.

Included: flights (economy class) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach for airport transfers and when venues are not within walking distance; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; interval refreshments at 2 of the performances; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local guides where required.

Accommodation. Grand Hotel Wien (grandhotelwien.com): Luxury hotel in a superb location on the Ringstrasse just a short walk to the opera house, traditionally furnished and decorated in a Viennese style. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

Music: tickets to 4 performances (1st category) are included, costing c. £650. *Tickets have been requested and will be confirmed in the autumn.*

How strenuous? This tour involves a lot of walking in the town centre, and should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Average distance by coach per day: 6 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 24 participants.