



Welsh National Opera

Peter Grimes, The Marriage of Figaro

11–13 April 2025 (ML 663)

3 days • £1,260 (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.

Mozart wrote his sparkling, satirical comic opera *The Marriage of Figaro* based on the revolutionary play by Beaumarchais which had been banned by the Austrian court. Mozart's librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, himself something of a rebel, wrote a libretto that is full of wit and emotion, showing Figaro's struggles as he tries to protect his fiancée Susanna from being seduced by his employer Count Almaviva on the eve of his wedding. In the end, Susanna is much more effective than Figaro in thwarting the Count and supporting the Countess, his unhappy wife.

Benjamin Britten took his inspiration for his first major opera, *Peter Grimes*, from a poem by the Suffolk poet George Crabbe. Crabbe's tale of a sadistic fisherman who bullies and mistreats the boys who work for him is set in Britten's own home of Aldeburgh, where the whole community is horrified by Grimes's misdeeds and cruelty. Grimes is forced to face the consequence of his actions when the boy dies, and the village turns on him to execute justice.



Wales Millennium Centre

Itinerary

Day 1. The tour begins at 4.00pm with a lecture and pre-opera dinner at the hotel. It is a short walk across the Cardiff Bay development to the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC) for the opera: *Peter Grimes* (Britten).

Day 2. After a morning lecture take the coach to the National Museum of Wales which has one of the finest collections of Impressionist paintings in the UK. Visit St Fagan's National Museum of History before returning to the hotel for dinner. Walk to the WMC for the opera: *The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart).

Day 3. Castell Coch – a 19th-century keep rising out of the ancient beech woods of Fforest Fawr, with medieval trappings and 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: £1,260.
Single occupancy: £1,530.

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.