



Opera in Vienna

Mozart, Nicolai, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev

1–6 April 2025 (ML 665)

6 days • £3,970

Lecturer: Dr John Allison

Four operas – *The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Nicolai), *Iolanta* (Tchaikovsky) and *Betrothal in a Monastery* (Prokofiev).

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

Based at a comfortable, traditional five-star hotel perfectly located beside 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.

A special highlight this season will be the opportunity to visit the Musiktheater an der Wien again, after a few years' closure for renovation. Formerly known as the Theater an der Wien, it 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*.

It's possible to see Prokofiev's *Betrothal in a Monastery* (1946) as the Soviet composer's answer to such operettas. A lighter-hearted work than most of Prokofiev's operatic output – and said to have been Stalin's favourite opera – it also draws on an unlikely source for a composer in Stalin's Russia, Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Duenna*. Its frothy antics are set (originally, anyway) in 18th-century Seville.

That, of course, is also the setting of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, another opera premiered in Vienna, at the Burgtheater in 1786. These days, the Burgtheater – still a



Lithograph 1902.

magnificent presence in Vienna – is a drama theatre, so our performance takes place in the venerable Staatsoper, one of the greatest opera houses of the world. The production is by the leading Australian (Berlin-based) director Barrie Kosky.

The Bulgarian star soprano Sonya Yoncheva sings the title role in the Staatsoper's new production of Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*, the composer's final opera, which shared a long double bill with his ballet *The Nutcracker* at its premiere in 1892. Written to a libretto by the composer's brother Modest Tchaikovsky, the opera tells a symbolic tale of its heroine's blindness and eventual wonderment as light enters her world.

Best remembered today for its overture, and premiered in 1849 just two months before its composer's death, Otto Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* ('The Merry Wives of Windsor', drawn of course from Shakespeare) is an appealing rarity and well worth catching on our visit to the Volksoper.

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. 3.00pm from London Heathrow to Vienna (Austrian Airlines). 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 Staatsoper: *The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart), Philippe Jordan (conductor), Barrie Kosky (production), Leonardo Neiva (*Count Almaviva*), Hanna-Elisabeth Müller (*Countess Almaviva*), Slávka Zámečnicková

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(Susanna), Philippe Sly (*Figaro*), Patricia Nolz (*Cherubino*).

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: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (*Nicolai*), cast to be confirmed.

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: *Iolanta* (*Tchaikovsky*), Tugan Sokhiev (conductor), Evgeny Titov (production), Ivo Stanchev (*René*), Boris Pinkhasovich (*Robert*), Dmytro Popov (*Count Vaudémont*), Attila Mokus (*Ibn-Hakia*), Daniel Jenz (*Alméric*), Simonas Strazdas (*Bertrand*), Sonya Yoncheva (*Iolanta*).

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 Musiktheater an der Wien: *Betrothal in a Monastery* (*Prokofiev*), Dmitry Matvienko (conductor), Damiano Michieletto (director), Evgeny Akimov (*Don Jerome*), Petr Sokolov (*Ferdinand*), Stacey Alleaume (*Louisa*), Elena Maximova (*Die Duenna*), Vladimir Dmitruk (*Don Antonio*), Anna Goryachova (*Clara*), Valery Gilmanov (*Mendoza*).

Day 6. The flight from Vienna to London Heathrow arrives at c. 2.15pm.

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: £3,970 or £3,690 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,510 or £4,230 without flights.

Included: flights (economy class) with Austrian Airlines (Airbus 320); travel by private coach for airport transfers; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local guides where required.

Accommodation. Hotel Bristol, Vienna (bristolvienna.com): 5-star hotel in a superb location on the Ringstrasse near the Staatsoper opera house, traditionally furnished and decorated. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

Music: tickets (1st category to 3 performances; 2nd category to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) are included, costing c. £700. *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. Public transport (metro or tram), is used on some occasions.

Average distance by coach per day: 6 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 24 participants.