



Opera at Wexford

Rare operas the speciality

28 Oct–1 Nov 2025 (ML 838)

5 days • £2,630

(includes tickets to 5 operas)

Lecturer: Dr John Allison

A festival famed for world-class artistic standards together with a spirit of conviviality.

Three rarely performed operas: Verdi's *Le Trouvère*, Handel's *Deidamia*, Delius's *The Magic Fountain*.

Early-career professionals perform Pocket Operas: Bizet's *La Tragédie de Carmen* and *The Dwarf (Der Zwerg)* by Alexander Zemlinsky.

Meetings with festival managers and artists, daily talks on the music, good dinners.

The idea of an opera festival aspiring to international standards in a tiny town in the remote south of Ireland was of course absolute madness. (Even today the population of Wexford, still a working port, is not much more than 20,000.) But some mad ideas work, and the Wexford Festival Opera succeeded beyond the wildest hopes of its founders 73 years ago. Despite struggles and challenges, it has continued to succeed, and is now ably and imaginatively steered by artistic director Rosetta Cucchi and executive director Randall Shannon.

Not the least daft aspect of the vision – the visionary being one Tom Walsh, the local anaesthetist – was the decision to focus exclusively on little-known or rarely-performed operas. Indeed, you may find that you have not heard of some or all of the three main operas. Don't worry, due diligence precludes duffers, and they are very likely to be sung, played and staged with panache and verve and general all-round excellence.

The glory of Wexford Festival Opera is not only musical. To say of the town itself that it is an ordinary, workaday place is not intended to denigrate. It does possess patches of beauty and interest (the estuarial light helps), but its very unpretentiousness means that the habitual Irish warmth of welcome and easy-going ways contribute to the conviviality and sense of common purpose. It may be amusingly incongruous to see a street of mariners' cottages pullulating with gents in dinner jackets (standard, incidentally, but not compulsory) but locals don't bat an eyelid. After all, it's their festival too.



Etching by George Cruikshank, 1886

Since 1951 the festival has grown steadily in ambition, accomplishment and fame. One triumph has been the building of a new home, named The National Opera House and recipient of numerous national and international awards since its opening in 2008.

The programme for 2024 revolves around the theme of Myths & Legends. The three mainstage operas are *Le Trouvère* (1857) by Giuseppe Verdi, *Deidamia* (1741) by George Frideric Handel and *The Magic Fountain* (1895) by Frederick Delius. We have booked top tickets for all three as well as *La Tragédie de Carmen* (1981) by Georges Bizet and *The Dwarf (Der Zwerg)* (1921) by Alexander Zemlinsky, performed by the Opera Factory, a course for early-career artists.

Aside from a rather special morning's exploration of the town's history and architecture, we have not laid on excursions or visits. There are talks and discussions daily, and there is a range of events and art exhibitions to entertain you. Time to rest and recharge will also be necessary. In addition to the talks by our own lecturer – John Allison, editor of *Opera* magazine and also of the Wexford programme book – there will be meetings with several people involved in running the festival.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 11.00am from London Heathrow Airport to Dublin. (Nearly every airport in the UK has flights to Dublin, so consider flying from one more convenient for you – there is a price reduction if you don't take the group flights.) The drive to Wexford is around two hours. Time to settle into the hotel before dinner.

Day 2. Two distinguished Wexfordians, both prominent in cultural institutions in the town, lead a morning walk. The first set of daily talks and discussions takes place today. During the trip our own speaker is joined by people involved in running or performing in the festival. Free time until dinner is followed by the 7.30pm opera: *Le Trouvère* (Verdi).

Day 3. Morning opera, *La Tragédie de Carmen* (1981). The brainchild of Wexford artistic director Rosetta Cucchi, the Opera Factory is a masterclass for young artists that culminates in a performance. An afternoon talk is followed by dinner and 7.30pm opera: *Deidamia* (Handel.)

Day 4. The daily talk precedes the afternoon opera: *The Dwarf (Der Zwerg)* (Zemlinsky). Dinner is followed by the 7.30pm opera, *The Magic Fountain* (Delius).

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continued

Day 5. By coach to Dublin Airport for the flight which arrives at London Heathrow Airport c. 5.30pm.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,630 or £2,510 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £2,880 or £2,760 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus A320); airport transfers by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; all 4 dinners (with wine, water, coffee) in good restaurants; all tips; all taxes; Festival programme book; services of the lecturer, tour manager, guides and guest speakers.

Music: tickets (top category) for 5 operas are included costing c. £600.

Accommodation. Clayton Whites Hotel (claytonwhiteshotel.com): a large, modern 4-star hotel in the centre of town, located a few minutes on foot from the opera house. Spacious common areas, capacious and comfortable bedrooms, restaurant and bar, lovely helpful staff. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There are some late nights but morning starts are also late and there is quite a lot of free time. You should be able to cope with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Coach travel is only for transfers to and from Dublin Airport: 100 miles each way.

Group size: between 10 and 24 participants.

Combine this tour with: *Footpaths of Umbria*, 20–27 October 2025; *Gastronomic Catalonia*, 3–10 November 2025; *Handel in Malta*, 21–27 November 2025.