

Revolution and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Opera
MUMH 5110: History of Opera, Spring 2026

Rebecca Dowd Geoffroy-Schwinden, PhD

Tuesday/Thursday 2–3:20pm (Music 295)

Office Hours Tuesdays 9:30–11 (Music 304)

This course follows eighteenth-century operatic genres from the tragedies of Lully and Handel to Gluck's Paris reforms and Mozart's greatest hits. Through the historical figures who consolidated and disrupted operatic conventions, we will come to understand how opera, by weathering waves of eighteenth-century reforms and "revolutions," became modern. (We will take time to interrogate what "modern" meant, too.) Our cast includes prolific one-name characters like the dazzling Farinelli, the prolific Metastasio, and the fashionable Marie Antoinette. We will dedicate time to watching entire operas to deeply understand the form's conventions and evolutions, as well as how contemporary performance choices emphasize or obscure historical realities. The goal of the course is, first, to defamiliarize a genre that we think we know, and second, to learn how to conduct rigorous historical research about opera, especially toward pedagogical and performance goals.

Course Learning Objectives:

- ◇ To learn the historical trajectory of eighteenth-century opera in French, Italian, English, and German
- ◇ To develop techniques in primary source study
- ◇ To systematically search for primary, secondary, and tertiary sources
- ◇ To assess sources for reliability and utility
- ◇ To formulate sound historical questions about eighteenth-century opera
- ◇ To determine appropriate methodologies for the study of eighteenth-century opera
- ◇ To design a rigorous historical research plan
- ◇ To apply historical research to contemporary decisions about opera production, performance, and pedagogy

Graded Work:

15 Participation/ Attendance

25 Discussion Guides (6 X 5 points each, lowest dropped)

20 Research Presentation

20 Final Research Product (Lesson Plan, Performance Proposal, Research Project, or other)

20 Final Exam

100 Total points possible

Scale

A= 90–100 (Above Average) **B**= 80–90 (Average)

C= 70–80 (Below Average)

D= 60–70 (Poor) **F**= 0–60 (Failed)

Course Materials

Texts are available on Canvas or digitally through the UNT Library catalog. The following books are on reserve at Willis Library for your convenience and research:

Carolyn Abbate & Roger Parker, *A History of Opera* (W. W. Norton & Co., 2015)
Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History*, v. 5, The Late Eighteenth Century (W. W. Norton & Co., 1998)
Anthony DelDonna & Pierpaolo Polzonetti, *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Opera* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) *e-book through catalogue
Enrico Fubini, *Music and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe: A Sourcebook*, trans. ed. Bonnie Blackburn (University of Chicago Press, 1994)
Pietro Weiss, *Opera: A History in Documents* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

AI Use and Academic Integrity

Eighteenth-century thinkers would have marveled at and feared the capacities of A.I. technologies like ChatGPT. You are welcome to use A.I. with two caveats: you must disclose the use of such platforms (even in generating ideas, reading, or taking reading notes) and *there is so much incorrect information about eighteenth-century opera generated by these platforms it is horrifying*. Hopefully you will learn enough in this course to begin spotting the errors! Hopefully I don't spot them in your work!

Content and Classroom Communication Disclaimer

Materials are included on this syllabus for the purpose of reflection and debate that will lead to rigorous approaches to research about opera. Assignment of materials in no way suggests that the course instructor agrees with or condones the views that they contain. Rather, the materials express ideas that various scholarly fields have, through the process of peer review, deemed worthy of critical engagement. A plurality of perspectives in response to these materials is necessary and encouraged. All views are welcome; however, politeness and civility are compulsory in all communications both written and oral. For the privacy and academic freedom of students, filming or recording class without the instructor's permission is prohibited. See UNT's [Student Code of Conduct](#) for more.

Attendance & Late Assignments

Absences must be due to university-approved circumstances. Missing more than three class sessions will result in a 2-point deduction from the final grade. Students should not schedule their end-of-semester jury against the class period. Discuss late assignments with me *in advance* of the deadline. There are *no extensions or make-ups* for participation assignments. Health, jobs, and family obligations are stressful; please reach out to me if you're falling behind or need to arrange for some flexibility.

Communication

Your access point for business and academic services at UNT occurs at my.unt.edu. All official communication from the university will be delivered to your Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect: eagleconnect.unt.edu

I will communicate with you through either Canvas Announcements or e-mail. Please contact me via e-mail, Rebecca.geoffroy-schwinden@unt.edu. Do not use Canvas messages.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Week/Day	Sub-Topic	Pre-class Reading/ Assignments Due	In-class Work
Week 1			
T 1/13	Welcome!		
Tragédie en musique			
R 1/15		<p>"Armide (i)" in <i>Grove Music Online</i></p> <p>Abbate and Parker "Opera's First Centennial," 26-67.</p> <p>The Center for Baroque Music at Versailles offers a user-friendly introduction to the French Baroque context and Court Music</p>	Begin <i>Armide</i>
Week 2			
1/20			Continue <i>Armide</i>
1/22		Naudeix, "Opera in France c. 1640-1710"	Finish <i>Armide</i>
Week 3			
T 1/27		<p><i>Tragédie en musique</i> primary source packet</p> <p>Listen to "Podcast 1" with timestamped notes</p>	
Opera Seria and Handel's London			
R 1/29		<p>1. <i>Armide</i> Discussion Guide Due</p> <p>"Giulio Cesare in Egitto (ii)" in <i>Grove Music Online</i></p> <p>Abbate and Parker, "Opera seria," 68-90.</p>	
Week 4			
T 2/3		<p>Charles King, "The Famous Mr. Handel"</p> <p>Weiss, "Handel's <i>Rinaldo</i> at the Haymarket Theatre," 65-72.</p>	Begin Giulio Cesare
R 2/5			Continue <i>Giulio Cesare</i>
Week 5			
T 2/10		Fubini, "The First Polemics on Opera in Italy," 35-65. (focus TBD)	Finish <i>Giulio Cesare</i>
R 2/12		<p>2. <i>Giulio Cesare</i> Discussion Guide due</p> <p>Martha Feldman, "Myths of Sovereignty," [extracts], <i>Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy</i> (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 248-257 and 268-283.</p>	Excerpts of Vinci's <i>Artaserse</i>

Week 6			
T 2/17		Hume, "The Beggar's Opera," in <i>Grove Music Online</i> Watch " OER Collaborations in the Performing Arts Library: The Beggar's Opera Digital Edition " at least to minute 15:38	Begin <i>Beggar's Opera</i>
R 2/19		Orla Smyth, "Not Caring One Farthing for Either Whig or Tory: John Gay's Satire of the Political Elites in <i>The Beggar's Opera</i> ," <i>Huntington Library Quarterly</i> 86, no. 3 (2023): 475-496.	Finish <i>Beggar's Opera</i>
Reform, Reality, & Comic Influences			
Week 7	The <i>Querelle des Bouffons</i>		
T 2/24		3. <i>Beggar's Opera</i> Discussion Guide due Taruskin, "The Comic Style," 399-437. Weiss, "The Président de Brosses in Italy (1739)," 81-90.	
R 2/26		Listen to "Podcast 2" with timestamped notes <i>Querelle des Bouffons</i> primary source packet	
Week 8	Maria Theresa's Vienna		
T 3/3		Hayes, "Iphigénie en Tauride" in <i>Grove Music Online</i> Abbate and Parker, "Discipline," 91-116.	Begin <i>Iphigénie en Tauride</i>
R 3/5		Mid-Century Reforms primary source packet	Finish <i>Iphigénie en Tauride</i>
SPRING BREAK 3/7-15			
Week 9	Marie Antoinette's Paris		
T 3/17		4. Gluck Discussion Guide due Charlton and Bartlet, "André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry" in <i>Grove Music Online</i>	Begin <i>L'Amant jaloux</i>
R 3/19		Excerpts from Julia Doe's <i>Comedians of the King</i> (Chicago, 2021)	Finish <i>L'Amant jaloux</i>

Week 10	Mozart		Begin <i>Don Giovanni</i>
T 3/24		5. Grétry Discussion Guide due Rushton, "Don Giovanni (ii)" in <i>Grove Music Online</i>	Continue <i>Don Giovanni</i>
R 3/26		Abbate and Parker, "Opera buffa and Mozart's line of beauty," 117-144, and "Singing and Speaking Before 1800," 145-159.	Finish <i>Don Giovanni</i>
Revolution			
Week 11			
T 3/31		6. <i>Don Giovanni</i> Discussion Guide due Jama Stilwell, "A New View of the Eighteenth-Century 'Abduction' Opera: Edification and Escape at the Parisian Théâtres de la Foire," <i>Music and Letters</i> 91, no. 1 (February 2010): 51-82.	
R 4/2		Excerpts from Julia Doe's <i>Comedians of the King</i> (Chicago, 2021)	
Individual Research Projects			
Week 12		Final Exam Study Packet Available	Draft Community AI Policy Create cards for History 101 Metagame: Eighteenth-Century Opera Edition
Week 13			
Week 14	Presentations		
T 4/21	1. 2. 3. 4.		
R 4/23	1. 2. 3. 4.		
Week 15	Presentations		
4/28	1. 2. 3. 4.		

4/30	1. 2.		Final Review: History 101 Metagame: Eighteenth-Century Opera
Week 16			
Monday 5/4	3-4: Team French 4-5: Team Italian	Study: ◇ the opera ◇ course materials ◇ "Mozart the revolutionary" study packet	Final debate: Mozart's operas as "revolutionary"

Required Syllabus Information

Retention of Student Records See: http://ferpa.unt.edu/	Registration Information for Students See: https://registrar.unt.edu/students
Academic Calendar, Spring 2026 See: https://registrar.unt.edu/sites/default/files/spring-2026-academic-calendar.pdf	Health and Safety Information Students can access information about health and safety at: https://music.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness
Counseling and Testing UNT's Center for Counseling and Testing has an available counselor for students in need. Please visit the Center's website for further information: See: http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services . For more information on mental health resources, please visit: See: https://disparities.unt.edu/mental-health-resources	Care Team The Care Team is a collaborative interdisciplinary committee of university officials that meets regularly to provide a response to student, staff, and faculty whose behavior could be harmful to themselves or others. See: https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care-team
Office of Disability Access disability.unt.edu . (Phone: (940) 565-4323)	Student Resources The University of North Texas has many resources available to students. For a complete list, go to: See: https://success.unt.edu/aa-sa-resources

Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total registered hours per term. Music scholarships require a 3.5 cumulative GPA. Students cannot exceed maximum timeframes established based on the published length of the graduate program. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility. If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended you schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college, an advisor in UNT-International or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course. See: <http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

Add/Drop Policy Please be reminded that dropping classes or failing to complete and pass registered hours may make you ineligible for financial aid. In addition, if you drop below half-time enrollment you may be required to begin paying back your student loans. See Academic Calendar (listed above) for additional add/drop Information. Drop Information: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html>